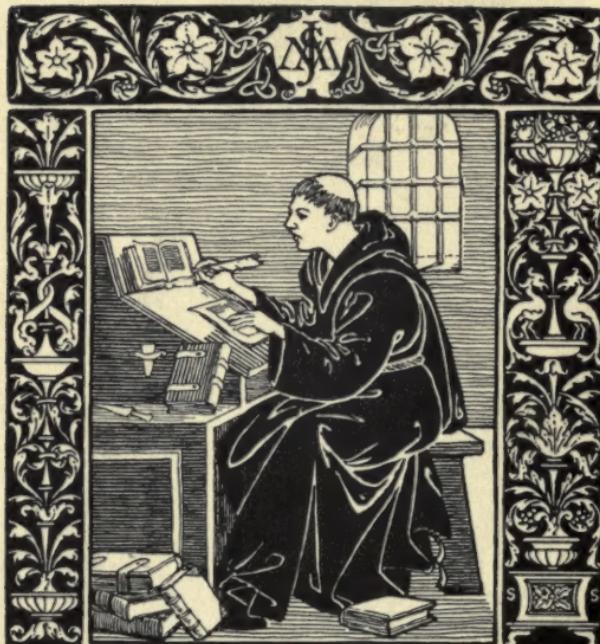


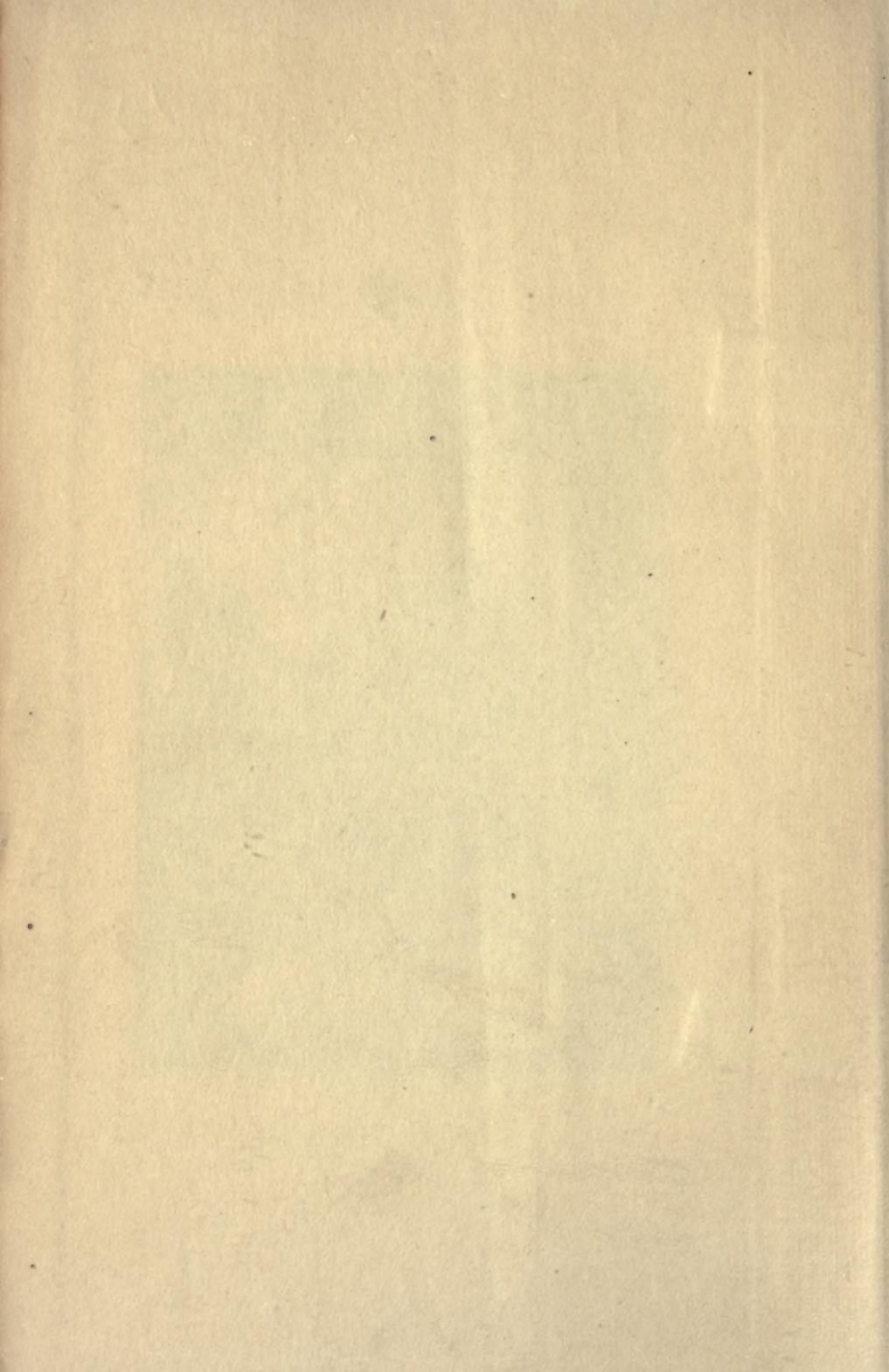
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EARTH TO
EARTH
• • •
RICHARD DEHAN





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Earth to Earth

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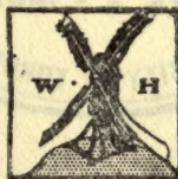
LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN

21, Bedford Street, W.C.

Earth to Earth

By
Richard Dehan

Author of
"The Dop Doctor," "The Man of Iron,"
"Between Two Thieves," etc.



London
William Heinemann

Flight to Earth



LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN. 1916

TO IRENE VANBRUGH

TO RENZO VANNETTA



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EARTH TO EARTH

I.

SHE had arrived in a well-appointed auto-brougham, and with a thundering double-knock; but with no other credentials to the confidence of the head-butler. She had refused to give her name, accenting the refusal with a truculent flourish of reserve which plainly intimated to that dignified functionary that he would not like it if he got it. She had asked, plumply and plainly, to see the Duchess, and it was not one of her Grace's *omnium-gatherum* reception-days, or even a Committee-day, when patriotic and philanthropic ladies (members of societies for the suppression of some things and the encouragement of others) were wont to muster in great numbers beneath the fostering wing of their Chief Patroness. Some of these were queer enough to look upon, as the head-butler could testify—it being a well-established rule in these twentieth-century days that the woman who lives to do well should also live to dress badly. But there was nothing that suggested Liberal Unionism or Female Suffrage about this lady, if, indeed, one might classify her under that generic heading; and as for Teetotalism, judging by the suppressed belligerence of her manner, the untrammelled freedom of her gestures, and the loudness of the tone in which she reiterated her request to be conducted to the presence of the mistress of the house (and paying due regard to signs and tokens of a more subtle and diaphanous nature still), she was at that moment a little in liquor.

"A drunken person to see your Grace!" The head-butler's imagination could not soar to the giddy heights of actual conception of the effect such an announcement would have upon his mistress. But he was very clear upon the point that the visitor must be got rid of. The question was, how to bring about this desirable exodus without a breach of the peace and the proprieties? The idea of a disturbance upon that exclusive threshold was not to be tolerated for a moment, and yet it hovered about the head-butler's polished cranium with the persistency of a bluebottle-fly. He saw the starch of his immaculate cravat, the almost archiepiscopal composure of his bearing, and the highly-respectable corns encased in his patent-leather shoes in immediate jeopardy, as well as the dignity of the house. Clearly, it was a case to be dealt with diplomatically.

But the stranger belonged to a class which does not appreciate diplomacy. When told that her Grace was engaged, she signified her intention of waiting till she wasn't; and upon receipt of information to the effect that her Grace had, contrary to the previous impression of the head-butler, gone out, she replied that she would sit down in the hall-porter's chair and stop till she came back. And she looked, in the opinion of the hall-porter, quite capable of doing it. It was at this crucial moment that a piano-organ, piloted by an Italian of revolutionary aspect and attended by a mangy monkey, impiously invaded the sacred precincts of the courtyard, and shook from its brazen barrel the fag-end of a popular music-hall refrain, left over from the last public-house. Some esoteric consonance in the note thus sounded to the dominant key of the situation struck the youngest and least stately of four gigantic footmen who had hitherto waited in impenetrable silence the passage of events. He burst into a guffaw which

lost him his situation within the month, and drew upon him the contemptuous attention of the visitor.

“ Well, Face,” she said, with a broad stare of dignified rebuke and that slight toss of the chin with which the stage-chambermaid has made us familiar. “ What are *you* grinnin’ at ?” Then her tone changed to one of cordial recognition. She extended a large hand, clad in a soiled light Suède glove, through which her diamond rings were arrogantly bursting. “ By the Lord !” she exclaimed, “ it’s Jem ! Used to valet His Nibs, usedn’t you, three years ago ! At the Beeches, Fulham, we was then. Only to think I shouldn’t ‘a’ known you at the first ! Well, and so you done sowin’ your wild oats ! Settled down to respectability and cold roast mutton, and fine things to keep up the calves on, judgin’ from what I see.” She laughed with a rollicking enjoyment of her own humour, and clapped the now blushing footman on the back. “ Me and you was always on good terms,” she continued, with an assumption of friendly patronage under which the miserable menial writhed visibly. “ But one thing I take unfriendly of you, Jem. When you come to ask the old lady to give you a trial, you ought to applied for a character to me. I’d given you one—I would, my toff, hot with —— and no mistake about it !”

She laughed again, and her laugh was husky and strident, and yet possessed of a penetrative quality which wakened strange echoes in the lofty hall. And at the sound of the cachinnation the head-butler shuddered in his shoes, and the cheeks of the rubicund hall-porter quivered like crimson jelly. For the name of the intruder was no longer to them unknown. Suffice to say that it was a name of evil savour even in common nostrils and upon coarse lips;—a name bedecked with garish weeds of flaunting reputation; be-daubed, morally, by foul associations and evil report; even

as it was in actuality by mud and filth cast up from the common streets against common hoardings. A name, for clamorous reasons specially tabooed within those portals, guarded by rampant proprieties, hallowed by the domestic virtues, overshadowed by memories of a long line of ancestors, men and women, for the greater part, of wisdom and of worth. And its owner, reading recognition in the faces about her, dropped her coarse attempt at anonymity, as a stage-player might drop a mantle at the wings, and broke into another peal of raucous laughter.

"Lord ! how the men look !" she cried. "One would think it was the Devil." A visit from that personage, who is at least of unimpeachably ancient lineage and established social position, would indeed have been preferable. "Come," she continued, "since you've asked me pretty, and have got a good idea—thanks to Flunkey, No. 4"—she indicated the youngest of the four colossal footmen with a comprehensive jerk of her thumb—"of what it is, I don't mind giving you my name. It's long enough to go up on half a dozen silver salvers—Miss Tilly Tinkleton, Viscountess Amberhurst. I've as good a right to the title as any woman alive, and I've a mind to use it for once. Say that the Viscountess Amberhurst has come to pay an afternoon call upon her mother-in-law. That's the message. Look alive and take it, one of you; or shall I run up and drop in on the old lady without any annuncin', in a friendly kind o' way ?"

She hiccoughed and strode forward. It was evident that she had primed herself to the pitch of the situation, and was not to be turned aside from the fulfilment of her purpose by any moral force. The horrified head-butler lost his head—and his temper—and signalled the footmen to advance. She folded her arms upon her generously developed bosom and confronted them, breathing defiance and

best French brandy. She was grotesque, with her reddened cheeks, and blackened eyelashes, her costly feathered hat pinned on askew over lumps of badly-bronzed hair, and her coarse superabundance of silks and sealskins; she was ridiculous, from the muddy hem of the torn Chantilly balayeuse that dragged behind her as she walked, to her topmost feather—and yet she was impressive, with her air of being a woman who could threaten nothing that she would not do, and who was, moreover, very thoroughly in earnest.

As the maddened butler called again upon his subordinates to cast her forth into the outer daylight, and as eight finely-turned calves took one unwilling step in her direction, she spoke again. She had laid aside her aggressive manner, and become upon a sudden astoundingly polite—a sign which, in the experience of the youngest footman, invariably presaged cataclysm and upheaval.

“Lay a finger on me,” she said invitingly, “and I’ll tear your faces off. I’ll not leave you with a nose or a whisker to share between you. I’ve beat two men before now—in a row—and it’ll take more than four over-fed funkeys to chuck me—Jem, there, can speak to that. But if you’ve a mind to try, you’re welcome, I’m sure.” She waited with an affectation of elaborate consideration before she spoke again. “If you ain’t a-going to try to bounce me, and if you don’t any of you see your ways to showin’ me up, I’ll show up myself. Here’s another kind love,” said Miss Tinkleton, “until we meet again!”

The cowed footmen fell back right and left as she advanced upon them. The head-butler would, in the case of a family bereavement, a family fire, or a family burglary, have known what to do, but was quite unable to cope with the present contingency; and the hall-porter was on the verge of apoplexy. So it came to pass that Miss Tilly

Tinkleton, with a defiant swirl of her untidy skirts, which revealed a pair of well-formed feet and ankles encased in smart boots from which the buttons were bursting, made a queen's move across the black and white marble chess-board of the hall, and went up the wide staircase.

II.

She encountered nobody during her ascent. Silent presences wrought in bronze and marble, or limned upon canvas by hands that centuries past had dropped the chisel and laid down the palette and crumbled into dust, looked down upon her unprotestingly. The westering sun, indeed, that streamed in through the great painted windows, threw ineffectual bars of gold and crimson and purple in her way; and the gauntleted hand upon the coat-of-arms held itself up in protest, or in warning, or in appeal—alike disregarded. She went up without stopping until she reached the landing of the first floor. There, for the first time, she paused, and looked up and down the corridor frowning, and chewing her lip in momentary irresolution.

“Puzzle, find the Duchess,” said Miss Tinkleton, “and when you've got her — ! ‘Ullo, cocky ! I want you !”

She had spied a little page, an alert, monkey-like creature, who now approached her, carrying a silver tray.

She spoke to the child in a thick whisper, holding up a half-sovereign between her finger and thumb.

“This for yourself if you'll tell me where the Duchess is ! Point to the room—it's enough for me. Third on the left ? Right you are ! Catch !”

She tossed the coin to the urchin, who flashed eyes and teeth and buttons upon her in one responsive grin of mischievous comprehension, and went with a long, swift,

noiseless step to the door he indicated, and knocked, with a grimace. She had the loose, mobile mouth and plastic facial muscles of the low comedian, and she was conscious, in a professional way, of the humorous value of the situation. But that consciousness did not prevent her from being strongly bent upon the fulfilment of her purpose. She took it for granted that the occupant of the room had said "come in," and went in, leaving the dregs of the sunset behind her.

It being late October, a bright wood-fire crackled in a steel basket, upheld by a pair of gilded amoretti, upon the wide tiled hearth, and the long luxurious room was full of dancing lights and shadows, and fitful gleams elicited from burnished metal and polished wood, and brilliant blots of colour, made by rich Oriental fabrics, upon the gathering dusk. Everything in that room there was of costly, rare, and strange, that might be gathered between the ends of the world to grace a great lady's drawing-room. But nothing stranger than the visitor, or rarer than the contrast between herself and her surroundings.

The aroma of a fine tea mingled with other subtle fragrances in the atmosphere, and an elderly lady, whose stern, handsome profile was strongly silhouetted against the hearth-glow, sat in a low chair near the fire with a little table by her side. She was reading letters, and very deliberately perused the closing sentence of the sheet she held in hand, and refolded and returned it to its envelope, before she said, with a slight accent of displeasure:

"I did not ring."

As she spoke, she transferred the last letter she had read to an orderly little pile of two or three that lay upon the corner of the tray beside her, and dropped her hands upon the heap that lay scattered in her lap, and ran her fingers, long and white and delicate, and sparsely adorned

with an antique jewel or two, through and through them as one might dabble in water. The oldest of the covers bore the date of thirty-three years back, and nearly all were worn and frayed, if not by constant handling, at least by the unseen, unfelt usage of Time. There was a piquant contrast between the delicate ribbon which had confined them—the delicate perfume which exhaled from them—and the coarse, common paper, or variety of papers, upon which they were written, in a scrawl which would have disgraced a groom. Certainly it was not a valuable collection of letters over which this lady sat and pondered; scarcely a correspondence to preserve, to edit, and publish with pride; unless, indeed, as the text accompanying a new edition of the *Rake's Progress*. None but a mother would have dreamed of keeping such letters, and this mother had brought them out to burn at last.

They were from a boy at Eton, and not a hopeful boy either; they were from a young man at College, and not a promising young man; they were from a lieutenant in the Guards, who was not popular amongst his brother-officers, or smiled upon by his Colonel; they were from a dissipated young loafer-about-town, who was going to the dogs with a rapidity which scandalised others who were ultimately bound for that destination; they were from a drink-besotted debauchee, whose very pen hiccupped as it formed the crapulous characters; but the same hand had written them, and the same nature was revealed in each. It was with a sigh of relief that the mother, her unlovely task of reviewal being ended, rose and emptied the lapful of letters into the jaws of the bright fire, which swallowed them at one gulp, as though it found the bolus nasty.

Three letters she had reserved from the general holocaust. These were of immediately recent date—the first heralding a re-opening of correspondence after a considerable interval

of silence. They were not, as many others, brawlingly defiant of condemnation, coarsely intolerant of reproof. The hand that had guided the pen was by many degrees more nerveless, the brain more sodden, than in the years that had gone by. Ink was scattered over them in blots, and here and there the paper was blistered and smeared, as though an abject tear had dropped upon the page. And the sentences crawled and slavered, and were abject too. They promised Amendment and Reform, in capitals, and future deference to the family opinion and regard of the Proprieties. The writer acknowledged that he had done none of those things which he ought to have done, and had left undone very few of those things which he ought not to have done, and that his only chance of rehabilitation lay in taking that step which his counsellors pointed out. It may be mentioned in advance that this crowning act of contrition, involving full and complete regeneration of body and soul, this fiery Ordeal through which the repentant prodigal was to pass, was nothing more or less than the Ordeal by marriage with a rich young girl.

Yes ! the sinner admitted, reluctantly, there was nothing else to be done. He contemplated the prospect with profound disrelish, but acknowledged that his alternative lay between the Devil and the deep sea; though he would be glad if anybody would tell him how "she" was to be kept quiet. She, it appears, was a woman—the woman, in fact, to whom his decadence was due. To her perverting power and infamous influence he ascribed the principal of his peccadilloes and the most signal of his sins. The woman had tempted him, it seemed, and he had eaten a great deal. She was a bad lot. He was very candid in acknowledging that. But now he was going to throw her over for good, and turn over a new leaf. Indeed the new leaves he professed his readiness to turn over would have made quite a

disrespectable volume. Only there was that question of the woman to be dealt with. She wasn't one of those you could bribe. . . . There was no knowing what she wouldn't do. . . .

The Duchess could imagine, as she laid the last letter by, what sort of creature this woman was who had entrapped and enslaved Amberhurst. She knew his taste. She closed her eyelids and evoked a vision of her. A coarse and bold-eyed woman, past her first youth,—a vulgar creature, whose conversation reeked of slang and profanity, and worse, even as her flaunting silks and velvets did of patchouli. Patchouli! Pah! the mere name of it had conjured up the base, suggestive perfume! —it stole to her high-bred nostrils even then. Sickened, she rose to open a window, and knew that she was not alone.

“Who are you? How did you come here! What do you mean by this insolent intrusion?”

For answer, out of the grove of shadows at the other end of the room came the woman of her vision, with assured step and defiant eyes, and rustling garments, from the folds of which was shaken the heavy, clinging odour that had betrayed her presence in the room, mingled with suggestions of hot fur and alcoholic potations. And even in the act of repeating, with angry insistence, her interrogations, the mistress of the house knew who she was and why she had come. Amberhurst had said she was capable of anything—there was no knowing what such a woman might not do. That she should attempt to force herself into the presence of his mother was a crowning act of audacity which might have been expected. She cast upon the intruder a look of withering contempt, and stretched an imperious hand to the bell.

Then the woman spoke. The Duchess recognised the

voice, with its peculiar hoarseness, as of an organ roughened by drink and dissipation, continually overstrained in heated atmospheres redolent with the fumes of gas, tobacco, and crowded humanity.

"Wait till I've answered your questions," the intruder said, "before you ring. My name's Tilly Tinkleton. I sing in the Halls for my livin', and I get it—good—that way. As for how I come here, I come in my own motor-car, and because I chose. With regard to my meanin', I tell you straight—my meanin' is to have it out with you. About Amberhurst."

"My solicitors," the Duchess said, with white fire upon her withered cheeks, and gray fire in the sunken eyes she turned so haughtily upon the unwelcome visitor, "have already been instructed to communicate with you. They will answer any inquiries you may choose to make—although I personally do not acknowledge your right to make them—or hear any statements you wish to make, officially. Your audacity in thrusting yourself upon me"—there was a clang of uncontrolled anger in her tone—"is monstrous, your presence under this roof a disgrace! Withdraw it! Go!"

"I'll go," said Miss Tinkleton, doggedly thrusting out her sensual under-jaw, "when I've said what I come to say. I'm not a-going to use language—I'm going to ask a question in a ladylike way. What the—what do you mean by coming between my man and me?"

"You are mad," said the Duchess contemptuously, "or else you are intoxicated!"

"As to being mad," returned Miss Tinkleton, "my head—though I've had to do with mad folk, mind you—is screwed on tight enough. As to bein' boozed—it's a state I've some acquaintance with. I'm as often boozed as not. Lord! if I wasn't, how do you think I should ever 'a' come

to take up with such a regular old soaker as your son ! Always disorderly and generally drunk. That's his character—if you come to me."

"With my son's vices," said the Duchess, "I have nothing to do. With yourself, as one of them, I decline association. Once more, I request you to withdraw. Once more, I refer you to my solicitors."

"I've wrote to 'em already," replied Miss Tinkleton. "Or rather—my Board School education havin' left off before it was begun—my chauffeur has wrote. He's a tip-top respectable young man, and a bit of a scholar. He give me warning yesterday, because he won't put up with Amberhurst's language. I don't blame him. He's a foul-mouthed beast—your son. He's not decent company for his own grooms. But he suits me," asserted Miss Tinkleton, squaring her prominent under-jaw; "he suits me, and I'm not a-going to give him up !"

"Your personal objections to the proposed change in my son's habits and mode of life," returned the elder woman, "was to be anticipated. But, believe me, it will not influence his determination to reform. He has, I rejoice to say, at last awakened to a sense of shame. He is repentant. He means to renounce his evil courses, and lead for the future the life of a self-respecting English gentleman—one day to be the representative of a great house and the bearer of an ancient title. He wishes to be reconciled with his family. He has given to the Duke and to myself a solemn promise——"

"The bally fool !" interrupted Miss Tinkleton. "He'd promise anything when he's drunk. He's promisin' away now, I'll bet, like steam ! The buttons off his coat—and he will wear them coppery costermonger ones like ha'pence beat out flat—or the teeth out of his head—and he ain't got many o' them left—or the strawberry-leaves out of his

coronet—to anybody—man, woman, or child—who'll fetch him a drain more brandy."

"He is not——"

"He is," asserted Miss Tinkleton with a confirmatory nod. "Blind! He's been on the blind-drunk for a fortnight past. He's got it on his mind that he's going to be married and made respectable, and he can't bear hisself no-how. It's your fault, it is. Why can't you let him alone? What's your moto for worrying of him? Come!"

"Woman!" cried the exasperated Duchess. "Do you mean to drive me beyond endurance?"

"Woman, if you like!" retorted Miss Tinkleton, flushing purple under her raddle. "But I don't think a nice old lady like you" (the Duchess with difficulty controlled a disposition to swoon upon hearing herself called a nice old lady by this very terrible person) "has got any idea what sort of woman. I'm a woman as can use her hands and isn't afraid to. I'm a woman that's had another woman's bonnet broke, and her back plaits off, in the middle of a public bar, before her men could part us. I'm a woman"—she pulled a crumpled cambric handkerchief containing a soiled powder-puff from her muff, and mopped her heated cheeks and refreshed them with a dab or two of powder, and went on—"I'm a fool, to be gassin' away like this, and forgettin' that I brought you a message from your son."

"I receive no messages from my son," the Duchess said, "that he sends me by his mistress."

"I'm that, I suppose," acknowledged the other bluntly. "But he don't keep me. I wouldn't beneath myself to be kept by such as him. It's the other way about, and don't you go to deny you know it. When he jumped through his money as if it had been a circus hoop of bank-notes, five years ago, he come to me. 'Till,' he says, 'I'm a bloomin'

paup. 'My family,' he says, 'won't come down with another ha'penny, and all the Ten Tribes is on my track. Take me in, though I've not behaved over good to you.' And I took him in, I took him in, and squared his creditors—I've squared 'em twenty times. Your lawyers knows it. You knowed it, and winked at it, the lordly lot o' you, while you kep' your pockets buttoned. He's mine. I've bought him, rickety body and ricketier soul, a dozen times over, and I ain't a-going to give him up ! No ! by the livin' Tinker !'

The little that was womanly in her surged to the surface in an explosive sob. The tears she repressed lent to her voice a salt shrillness that was like the cry of a seagull.

"Not that he's anything to set a value on," she went on. "He knows that himself. It's in the message. 'Tell 'em,' he says, 'that I take back them letters. They was wrote when I was in a state of sobriety, and consequently not responsible. Tell 'em that if the young woman'—meanin' her as you want to marry him to—'tell 'em,' says he, 'that a young woman who'd be willin' to take a blackguard like me for her husband because he'd got a handle to his name ought to be ashamed of herself. If she ain't, I am for her. Show 'em that black eye I gave you'"—she pushed her veil aside and turned her face so that the light fell upon a discoloured temple and swollen eyelid, and further revealed a cut upon her cheek—"and ask 'em whether one like it 'ud suit her style of beauty ? And tell 'em that she may keep her money, and be d——d ! I'm goin' to stick to Tilly, that's stuck so true to me. She might 'a' married me before now if she'd chose.' And that's God's truth. He's begged me, on his knees, a dozen times."

"And you refused him ?"

The note of scornful incredulity in the other's tone roused

her to resentment. She clenched her coarse hands in their strained and ill-fitting gloves, and drops of perspiration stood upon her forehead.

"I'm tellin' truth. I might 'a' been a Viscountess—a bloomin' Viscountess, sittin' in a turret and sewin' tapestry, if I'd 'a' liked. But I'm a honest woman—in my way. I wouldn't take a mean advantage," said Tilly Tinkleton, "and bring shame upon folk as had done me no harm, even to better myself—if marryin' Amberhurst could better any woman. And for another thing, he couldn't stick to one he'd gone to church with. It isn't in his blood. I don't blame him. I make allowances. It's his bringin' up. Swell men are all alike. I've lived with the best, and seen 'em at their worst—and I know."

The tears were dried by now upon her painted cheeks, and her loose mouth was tense with something like scorn.

"My Lady, or your Grace—I forget which is the right name to call you by—you says to me just now you and your like ain't responsible for your son's vices. If that's the case, I says to you,—Who is? Why, you breed 'em and rear 'em for such women as me! You send 'em to your public schools, and shut your eyes to what goes on there. 'Boys will be boys!' says you. You send them to College. 'Young men will be young men!' you says, and claps your blinkers on again. Your daughters grow up in birdcages, your sons in the common stews. They shame their own servants with their beastly ways. Earth stinks with 'em, and Hell ain't none the sweeter; while, as for Heaven, there won't be many peers upon the benches of the Upper House when the last Parliament opens, you bet!"

She brought her clenched hand down upon the back of a fragile chair near her, with such force that it was broken as she uttered these closing words.

"I didn't go to do that," she said, in rough apology. "I come here to behave like a lady, and keep my temper, and if I've done any damage I'm sorry for it. Leave Amberhurst to me. Drop threatenin' and bullyin' and coaxin' him to do the dirtiest thing he's ever done in all his dirty life. If it was for his good—if there was any hope for him—or help—in it—I'd let him go. I would, as Gord sees me, without a word! But things has gone too far. He's got no hope nor help on earth except in Till, that's stood by him and will stand by him—until the end. So, leave him be. I'll never marry him. I'll swear it, if you like, upon the Book. And he shall never ask you for a penny; I'll take care o' that. He's a shame and a disgrace, even to me. He's dangled for years betwixt the mad-house and the gaol, with none but me to keep him out of either. And I've got used to him and his faults. I don't see my ways to parting from him until he kills himself or murders me, and he's as like to do one as the other, any hour in the twenty-four."

The fumes of liquor had died out in her. There was pallor under her rouge, and from the painted windows of her eyes something looked out that, lost and degraded as she was, ennobled her.

"I'm told you're poor"—she drew a slip of coarse gray paper from the pocket of her muff—"that is, for great folks. I'm told you'd do anythin' for money. Here's a blank cheque signed with a bad name that's good—at the Bank. Fill it up to your own tune—there'll be enough for Amberhurst and me as long as I've got my voice, and can do my double turn at the Halls o' nights, and set the gallery singin' in chorus to the tune of seventy quid a week."

She threw the cheque upon the table.

"Take it," she said, "and leave me him. For the time

he's got to live, let me keep him. Why am I doin' this ? your eyes are askin'. I'll tell you : Because I'm a woman that's used to have her way, and I've made up my mind to go to the Devil on a motor-bike made for two. And because—but I'm keepin' my chauffeur waitin'," said Miss Tinkleton, with an irresistible flash of humour, " outside your door, and he won't like it, bein' such a respectable young man ! Good-afternoon."

LIFE AND THE MACWAUGH

I ENOUNTERED The MacWaugh yesterday in the quadrangle of North-West Studios. He was looking worn and fagged. Had travelled up by the night train from Bournemouth, and had walked all the way from Paddington to save the cab fare. It was snowing fine and thin, and he had on a gossamer overcoat, not originally designed to stand the stress of winter and rough weather. He was on his way to negotiate with the men to whom he had sub-let his studio, over the sale of two antique oak presses, handsome articles of wreckage, left upon the bare beach of Impecunosity, by the receding tide of Fortune. In one of them The MacWaugh used to keep his evening clothes—superb garments, of which the coat-sleeves had embraced the waists of sirens of the fashionable Parisian half-world, and whose lower surfaces had been on terms of familiarity with the gilded fauteuils of the green-room of the *Comédie Française*—according to the testimony of their owner. Gone are those days; but the clothes remain to tell of them and such of us as were straitened enough in means, and large enough in stature to fill them out, used to borrow them on great occasions.

The MacWaugh—I should explain that the Gaelic prefix was conferred upon Patrick David Waugh by the inhabitants of North-West Studios in virtue of an accent imported from North o' the Tweed, and a distinctive ruggedness of character, as of features—which last might, by a quarryman but slightly gifted with the creative artistic instinct, have been hewn out of a block of Aberdeen granite in a sportive half-hour—The MacWaugh's reason for selling those presses

was written in large type upon his personality. The grayish hues and drawn lines of his face, the band of cheap crape upon his arm, spoke plainly enough. She was dead, and he wanted money to defray the burial expenses. She was dead—and the shoulders that had bent for many months past under the weight of the helpless, complaining burden, were bowed now in sorrow for its loss.

"Ay, she is gone," said The MacWaugh. "Poor bit thing! Full of life—and hope—up to the last; and then—it was a sair surprise to her to—" He coughed, and it was such an uncertain kind of cough that he explained: "This will be a bit of a cold I have caught in the train. Anybody that will be fashionless enough to sit facing to the engine just gets his deserving—in catching a cold. Yes; she died the night before last at twalve o'clock precisely. Crashaw was wi' her, holding her hand. If any of them that have cast it up at her that she was ungrateful had been there, and heard her thank him for all his generosity an' considereation, they would have been shamed to tears." He shaded his eyes with a coarse hand splashed with yellow freckles. "I heard all she said, though her voice was little above a whisper. Was sittin' outside the door. Sick folks—and dying—aye have strange fancies; and ye will understand it was quite natural that she could not bide to have me near her—towards the last. Am a clumsy fellow, even at the best; and when I have been sittin' up nichts, I am aye a heavy companion in the daytime. But Crashaw—Crashaw made up for my shortcomings. I'm most thankful that he answered my letter, and came to see her. I was feared he would be prevented. He is getting a great man is Crashaw, while she——" He broke off again with the cough that was so much like a sob. "Toch!" he said, resentful of his own emotion. "Ye will be putting me down for a sentimental—*or a fule*. But

oh, man ! I feel wonderfully like as if I had had a wife—and lost her."

She was originally a domestic servant, of Irish extraction, and in the aforementioned capacity unfitted to satisfy vigorously moral mistresses, because of her beauty, which was as great as her ignorance, and as undeniable as her innocence. Her masters were not prejudiced by the trait, which shows the wider scope of male justice. When the worthy proprietor of the shop in the Harrow Road and the pew in the Bethesda Tabernacle made manifest the failing in which so many Scriptural patriarchs have shared, and looked with favour upon the handmaid, she was at first grateful. Then she got frightened, appealed to her mistress, and received her dismissal. And the day she was turned out, bag and baggage, Crashaw found her crying upon the doorstep of a Servants' Home in the Edgware Road, spoke to her, noted the artistic possibilities latent in her face and form, though she was hollow-chested and meagre from overwork and bad feeding in those days, and engaged her for a model on the spot.

We all know Crashaw—have all admired him. Gifts and graces are his that have been denied to other young fellows. He never did, never has done much; but he has such an ineffable way of doing what he does do ! Even when he sat upon three boxes in the Sculpture Gallery of the British Museum, determining angles with a plumb-line, and picking out high-lights with bread pills, he was popular and admired. When he got into the Academy Schools it was just the same. He tried for the Gilchrist Scholarship, and failed so brilliantly that Dobbs, who got it, was left in the shade. And when he emerged from the oven of the Academy Schools, and launched his lovely china vase upon Life's tide, with the pots and kettles, a certain wooden

porridge-bicker floated beside him at the outset, and warded off collisions, and took bumps in his service with a devotion that was worthy of its object. He shared The MacWaugh's studio, and, indeed, everything the rough fellow had. Crashaw held the noble old Bohemian doctrine about the community of property which should exist between those who are brothers in Art. Everything he himself possessed was at the service of The MacWaugh—and if he did not happen to have anything, that was not his fault. The MacWaugh had once been well-to-do, and still possessed something.

"Toch!" he would say, when sounded on the subject of his vanished riches. "It was not such a gey lump to have, but yet a hantle to lose. What made away wi' t? Light company, male and"—he would shake his head solemnly—"and female. Reckless spendthrifting, witless wastawawing, drink an' debauchery of a' kinds. Looking back upon the past dispassionately, and the persons wi' whom I associated, I cannot, in common honesty, say they were any warse than myself. There are some would tell ye I was far and away the most abandoned character o' the whole clamjamfray. And I am well served for my doings. The money is gone, my constitution wreckit." He would hold out an arm whose pith and sinew would have put a blacksmith to shame, and blow a paviour's sigh from the depths of a capacious pair of lungs. "Am guid for nothing but an Awfu' Warning. Let all young men that would be weel guided tak' me in time." He would end thus, with a look of rugged tenderness at the Admirable Crashaw.

Crashaw found Cinderella on the doorstep of the Servants' Home, as I have said, and brought away the news of the great discovery to The MacWaugh. He was wild with exultation. The girl was his type-ideal, as rare and unique as the original of the *Astarte Syriaca*, which set the coping-

stone upon Rossetti's reputation. If she could be preserved to him exclusively, he felt that his fortune was as good as made. He had settled a bargain with her already. A pound a week was not much; and the porter's wife had a spare bedroom at the lodge, and for a small sum would house her. And she could have her meals at the studio, which she would employ herself in keeping beautifully clean and tidy. The decorative element needed to light up the dingy place would be supplied by her personal graces—with much more to this effect. The MacWaugh looked blankly at his young friend.

"A pound a week, wi' her room's rent an' keep. Whaur is the money to come from?" he said soberly. Crashaw burst out laughing, and dealt him a playful punch in the ribs, just over the waistcoat pocket where The MacWaugh carried his grandfather's handsome gold repeater. . . . What transpired is not known—only by results—for Ally Kinshela came to North-West Studios, and The MacWaugh told the time by a fifteen-shilling Waterbury, instead of an auriferous turnip worth forty pounds.

It must be admitted that the studio did not gain in cleanliness by Ally's permanent installation. She was no neat-handed Phyllis, but the reverse; and The MacWaugh, considerably averse to invoking the aid of the porter's wife, who had been supplanted in her cleanly cares by the new arrival, undertook a good many odd jobs of housewifery, shamefacedly and in secret. As a model the girl was perfect. She was never weary of posing for Crashaw, though she would sit to nobody else. He was a demi-god in her ignorant eyes. He had saved her from drudgery—clothed her in the fresh and pretty gowns she now wore—alas for The MacWaugh's horological turnip! From his pocket came the weekly sovereign she invested in useless purchases, having no more instinct of providing for the

freezing winter of ill-luck than has a London sparrow. For him she could be patient, intelligent, industrious. And he painted as he had never painted before. The Academy picture, exhibited the ensuing spring, and generally recognised as the first successful bid for fame on the part of a rising young artist—the “Ænone,” so favourably noticed by the great Scalpel in the *Daily Tomahawk*, and subsequently purchased by the Corporation of Smokeborough for its Art Gallery. Crashaw is not capable of noble flights of ideality; he seldom, where the choosing of a subject is concerned, wanders beyond the *Eton Reader and Reciter*, where examples of the poets may be found in abundance; and Jenkins’s *Historical Scenes and Events* is the other volume of his private library. But his brush has a photographic faithfulness, and he is a master of technique—in his way. If Topsy Tirlepin or Sarah Scroggs had sat for Crashaw’s “Ænone,” Ænone would have been a faithful representation of Topsy or of Sarah.

But Ally Kinshela posed as the daughter of the river-deity, who was deserted by the faithless shepherd-prince, and the result was highly successful. She was wonderful to see, with her opaque ivory skin, her great gray-blue eyes drowsing under their valance of black lashes, her cloud of dusky hair, and mouth like a half-withered blossom of the crimson rhododendron. Crashaw succeeded splendidly in reproducing the look of infinite reproachful yearning that would dawn in those splendid eyes when he refused to take her out, or neglected to admire her new ribbons, or did not tell her where he got his buttonhole bouquet. The girl was, many of us believe, as innocent as she was helpless; pure with the purity of some young forest creature. If she was in love with Crashaw she did not know it. Perhaps he did. Setting aside her boundless devotion and gratitude to him, it must be admitted that Ally was not an amiable

character. She was sullen, peevish, exacting. She took all she could get, and derided the givers—all save the Admirable Crashaw. The advances of one or two good-humoured artists' wives she repudiated with contempt, calling them "old things," and supposing that their husbands wanted to steal sittings of her—from Crashaw. She was uncivil to The MacWaugh, upon whose light purse she was a heavy burden.

Pass we on to the time when Crashaw, whose reputation was nearly full-fledged, took flight from The MacWaugh's studio, where he had absorbed the only good light and occupied the one bed-chamber—The MacWaugh being content with a turn-up bedstead in a corner of the painting-room—for years. He went abroad, taking with him a great many studies of Ally. He was next heard of in Paris, where he had discovered another type-ideal. Crashaw has an unfailing eye for these type-ideals, and has now quite a little gallery of them. The MacWaugh was left, colossal, fronting anxieties. What was to be done with the girl? That pound a week, with the concomitant expenses, was an awful tax on his limited means. He bethought himself of getting the girl some sittings, and succeeded in everything but making her sit. She was faithful to the absent, and indignantly refused. The idea that she must work for her living never seemed to enter her mind. And she was ailing—getting haggard, and losing her looks. The porter's wife thought there must be decline in her family. Could The MacWaugh cast the poor, friendless, orphan young creature upon the rude mercies of the world again? Not he! He made over Crashaw's vacant room to her, and waited on her assiduously, devoting to her service all the time he could spare from the bad little pictures he loved so to paint. And in that screened off, carpetless corner of the painting-room, where his camp-bed,

bath, and folding washstand stood, he spent sleepless nights in wondering what was to be done with her.

“ If I could but see my way,” he would say to me, with a puzzled look on his honest face. “ Servitude in a menial capacity would be over an’ out o’ the question. Am wonderin’ why the Lord was so unthrifty as to mak’ such a delicate piece o’ jeweller’s handiwork without providin’ a case to keep it from soil an’ defacement. Ay, it is just wonderful to note the artistic instincts she has, and sore puzzling to wonder where she got them. There’s the six guineas that”—he looked sheepish—“ were wanted to buy her a winter set-out—dress and mantle, and so on. She thought they came from Crashaw, and I doubt no’ but he would have sent them if he had thought of it. Well, she went out and bought a Liberty silk thing—they ca’ed it a tea-gown—and came home as happy as a bairn. Toch ! ye will think me an auld wife in my clavers, but I am sore harrit to know what will became of her. She would make a grand mistress for a rich man, ye ken; but Moraleety is against that; and though it is doubtful whether she knows what Moraleety means, she would never consent to it. And if a poor man was to offer her marriage—— !” He grew husky, and the hand with which he was lighting his pipe shook so that the match went out. “ If a poor man—— ! Toch ! she would juist laugh at him.”

“ Unless he had strong claims upon her gratitude and respect,” I suggested.

The small, ugly eyes of The MacWaugh grew threatening. He clenched a huge and hairy fist. “ The very fact o’ his putting such claims forward in such a way would, in my opinion, prove the fallow to be but a scoundrel,” he said, with a calm, ponderous ferocity I had never known him to exhibit before. I changed the subject hastily.

The next event was the failing of Ally’s health. She took

no exercise, moped, lost appetite, and cried continually. The doctor was called in, and recommended change of air. There was constitutional weakness of the lungs, if no organic disease, he said. A friend of his, a medical practitioner, residing at Eastgate-on-Sea, would receive the patient into his eminently sanitary establishment, and guarantee her cheerful society and an ultimate return to convalescence—terms, two guineas and a half weekly. Heaven knows how The MacWaugh scraped and contrived to find those guineas; but find them he did, and Ally went to the sea. It was not long before he received a pathetic letter complaining of Ally's lot. The family of the medical practitioner were vulgar, the servants "impudent," the "meals that Badly kuked as a Dog would not Ait them so pleas Fetch me awa at wunse. With humbel duty to dear Mr. Crashaw and do so Hop i shall see Him suns again yours truly Ally."

The kindly soul of The MacWaugh was moved to much compassion when he came to Eastgate-on-Sea. Ally was terribly changed in the past few months. It was plain that she was suffering from some pulmonary disease—necessary that a London specialist should see her. He saw her, and pronounced her sentence of death. Tuberculosis was too far advanced to be arrested, and a year, at most, would be the length of Ally's tether. He gathered some of the facts of the case—not from The MacWaugh—and though he did not return those hardly-got five guineas, he offered to get the girl received as an inmate of the Incurable Ward belonging to the Hospital for Consumption. A bed was vacant, and he would use his influence. The MacWaugh thanked him, and, with a heavy heart, broke the news to Ally Kinshela. With the pathetic hopefulness which is a common symptom in like cases, she refused to believe that she was in any danger. The hospital suggestion was a plan

to get rid of her. She cried herself worse at the thought of it. And The MacWaugh, with his great heart brimming over with Ruthful tenderness for her, gave in, and promised everything she wanted. He sub-let the studio, cheaply, for the sake of the first six months' rent paid in advance, and took his charge to Bournemouth. He was nurse, cook, lady's-maid, companion, drudge—everything in turn. He made the dingy rooms pretty with flowers and Persian rugs, art pottery, and studies of Crashaw's. Heaven knows how he pinched himself! Heaven also knows what small coin he got in the way of thanks! But the girl was dying. He sank her peevish complaints, her thanklessness, in the ocean of his own inexhaustible tenderness and compassion for her. He even—though it was bitter to him—consented to write to Crashaw, who had not manifested any consciousness of the existence of such a being as The MacWaugh for eighteen months past, begging him to come and see the last of his first type-ideal. And Crashaw came.

Crashaw beautifully dressed, and more delightful than ever. The sick girl rallied in his bracing atmosphere. He was full of stories, jokes, and fun. He pretended to believe that it was all a humbug about her being at death's door, and she believed so really. Had he not said it? She was beautifully contented in his presence. She bestowed on him more thanks for peeling her an orange than she had given The MacWaugh during the three years of their acquaintance. She turned from him, good soul, more peevishly than ever, now that the brilliant perfections of Crashaw threw his disadvantages into relief. His hands were clumsy, his boots creaked, his tweed suit smelt of tobacco, and that not of the best. And he was niggardly about humouring her little fancies. She greatly desired a sealskin mantle, such as she had seen fashionable invalid ladies wear on the Parade. Not a mean imitation, but

the real article—cost thirty guineas or so. She harped upon the subject, and enlisted Crashaw in the cause, and he took The MacWaugh aside, and said she really ought to have it. So The MacWaugh set his shoulder to the wheel—an aching shoulder by this time—and the glorious garment was purchased. It would have to be sold again as soon as—as soon as—! But, in the meanwhile, there it was, soft and furry, covering Ally's sharp shoulders as she sat propped up in bed. She was delighted with it, and thanked Crashaw for it, in her characteristic way. It was equally characteristic that—as The MacWaugh sat watchful on the landing outside the sick-room, for the doctor had warned him that his presence only irritated the patient—she should make a present of it to the landlady, in token of gratitude for services rendered. And still more in keeping that, as The MacWaugh still sat upon the landing, with his bristly chin propped upon his fists, staring with blank eyes at the blank party-wall, Ally should die, clinging to the hand of Crashaw, her benefactor, with the last fibre of consciousness. She left little behind her but thanks and gratitude—to the wrong legatee; and when asked whether she did not wish to say good-bye to The MacWaugh, only responded with a flicker of dissent. So she went out of the world, blind to the last, ungrateful to the last; turning away, even in the supreme moment, from the stanch and tender heart that had been her buckler against the slings and arrows of an evil fate for so long. She looked like a broken lily as she lay in her coffin, and Crashaw made a study of the face for the last time before he went away.

It was the remembrance of her, perhaps, that made The MacWaugh, who had to sell the poor remains of his departed grandeur to pay the ground-rent of her last earthly tene-
ment, to cough and blink, as he said again: “Am a fule, no doubt. But, man ! I feel as if I had had a wife—and lost her !”

SOCIETY AND THE MACWAUGH

“I HAVE done wi’ the warld, and the warld has done wi’ me,” said The MacWaugh. “I am consumed wi’ no ambeetions o’ rising. My desire is not to float wi’ the scum, but to sink wi’ the sediment—an’ be forgotten!” He laid down his empty pipe upon his paint-stained table, and folded his great arms upon his broad, though somewhat sunken chest, and rounded his shoulders so that his old shooting-jacket of coarse gray tweed rucked painfully about the collar.

“So, let me gang my gate. I question the pleasure o’ none o’ my fellow mortals. I have respect an’ tolerance even for the prejudices o’ the spiders in their webs, and ye will admit”—he cast his glance about the grim, bare, dusty studio with something like a smile—“there are more than a few fine specimens o’ the *genus Araneida* on the preemises—even when I am, as at the present meenute, completely sober. I will thank ye to open the cupboarrd at your elbow, and pass me the whisky—the formaleety o’ a tumbler being unnecessary, unless ye will drink yourself, which, in the case o’ a young man o’ your poseetion an’ prospects, I should no’ advise, consideering that it is not half an hour since breakfast.”

“Since your breakfast, perhaps. But the five o’clock tea-trays are being carried up the courtyard at this moment.” The exposure of my watch contributed irrefragable evidence in proof of the assertion.

“Put it up—put it up! I object to ostentation in the young,” said The MacWaugh. “Ye will remember that

since I lossed my grandfather I have no means o' telling the hour o' day."

" You mean the brass-faced clock with the japanned case you sold to Millars ?"

" Preceesely. A vainglorious relic o' my bygone days o' prodigality. Toch !"—he laughed in his odd way—" am no' saying I was not sorry to loss her; but balance the incessant urrgings of a mighty thirst—like mine—against the mere wish to be inforrmed o' the time—a frivolous weakness, outcome o' the degeneration o' the warld, like the habit o' drinking tea an' smoking paper cigars—and ye will comprehend. A brass-faced clock, as ye are saying. Ten years she stood in that corner, telling me things o' small importance—like a commonplace wife—ower an' ower again; the changes o' the moon—the day o' the month—the hour o' denner, maybe, when my pockets were as empty as Millar's heid. But ance she was gone, I missed her sorely—as a man nicht wake to miss the commonplace, busy, prattling guidwife I likened her to a meenute ago. The constant tick-tock I had never noticed left a vacuum in my brain. The long sleepless nichts o' pain were sheer agonies wi'out it." He rose and began to tramp heavily up and down the carpetless boards. " So I went out," he said, " an' cast away three-an'-saxpence—the price o' a bottle o' whiskey—in the purchase o' a smart American affair—a pert round-faced bit creature wi' a tick like a grasshopper's cheepin' on an August nicht." He shook his head. " I was a fule to think the new could ever mak' up for the auld. I nicht have guessed what the end would be. Twenty-four hours I bore wi' her, an' then I rose up in my wrath an' hurlit her out o' the back window into the mews, an' her inside came out, and it was a' ower wi' her. The bairns made spinning-tops o' her wheels. Toch ! An' since then I have breakfasted at afternoon tea-

time, an' eaten my supper when by richts I should be taking lunch. Not that there is much guidance in the victuals. A mutton-chop an' a cauld potato—a crust an' a tait o' cheese; or if these are no' upon the bill o' fare, a pipe an' the whisky—*toujours* the whisky."

" You can't live upon whisky."

" It is my intention," replied The MacWaugh, " to dee upon it. A man—every man—has a claim to the richt o' selection of the vice that will ultimately destroy him. Drunkenness is my choice. I have deleberately—! But that's auld news. Tell me o' yourself. Do ye prosper ? Are there commeesions in your letter-box an' invitation cards in the rim o' your chimney-glass ? My Lady Bonny Bogle at Home at Tairtiger House, Belgravia, from four to seven, on the sixth Thurrsday in the month. Low tea an' tall talk. Stale cake an' fresh celebrities—the writer o' the newest realistic novel; wi' the critic who first explained to the public that she was a genius; player men an' player women, wi' their wives' an' husbands' understudies; painters who tell ye they paint for Fame, an' charge fortunes for their pectures; painters who paint for money an' get none at a'; short-haired female lecturers on Franchise; long-haired minor poets ! the latest professional beauty—newly migrated from America by way o' Hoxton—wi' the scalp o' a titled conquest danglin' at her chatelaine, an' the whole tirlie-birlie o' Society at her tails."

His gray eye twinkled, though his granite features were unmoved. I changed the conversation. I do not care to be reminded of the occasion upon which I undertook the relaunching of that teak-built but battered vessel, The MacWaugh, into the long-abandoned waters of Society.

I cannot now comprehend what induced me to make the experiment. The MacWaugh had always expressed wild opinions with regard to social ordinances, holding the un-

written laws of custom and conventionality in savage scorn, and never seeming to lose relish in denouncing, with a copious flow of language, and in an accent imported from North o' the Tweed, the idiocy of those human beings who persisted in compliance therewith.

But I had a card for myself and a friend, and, in a rash moment, I invited The MacWaugh to accompany me, and was stricken chill by his unlooked-for complaisance. Certainly he made a very creditable appearance. He had disinterred from the recesses of an antique press, which had not yet been converted into ready money, a gray frock-coat and accompaniments—palatial garments which had been made in the vanished days of his prosperity.

“I had it on my mind not to disgrace ye,” said The MacWaugh, surveying himself in the battered studio swing-glass with uncritical gravity, “young men like yourself being apt to attach siccan a weight o’ importance to unimportant details o’ dress an’ so forth. Am thinking it will be sixteen years since these cam’ home. Toch ! I should no’ wonder to find myself setting the fashion.”

He produced a ponderous pair of knitted woollen gloves and drew them soberly on; refrained, at my entreaty, from filling one waistcoat-pocket with loose tobacco, and utilising the other as a receptacle for his venerable briar-root; and, not without secret misgivings upon my part, we started.

The afternoon reception was given in a highly decorated mansion situated between Cavendish Square and Regent’s Park. It was, like the giver—a notoriety-hunter of eminence—upon a large scale, and largely attended. There was a crush in the hall, a jam upon the staircase, and a mob in the drawing-rooms. Everybody who was the vogue had been asked—celebrity was the rule, not the exception, among the guests. I cannot at this moment account for the

fact of my having received an invitation. Yet there I was; and there, looming like a rugged gray crag over a frivolous picnic party, was the colossal figure of The MacWaugh.

“Tooh!” said he, as he drew off his woollen gloves, and gravely surveyed the assemblage. “There is an unco’ blending o’ elements here.”

We were swept off our feet by a human wave, and cast up on the landing.

“My dear Mr. ——” My lacerated self-consciousness shrank and quivered as it became plain that our hostess had forgotten my name. “How sweet of you to come!” she continued, looking over my shoulder. Then a light came into her eye. “Who is your friend?” she said, with interest. “Of course, he is Somebody—he could not fail to be Somebody—with such a head.”

“Only Nobody,” said The MacWaugh, “would be likely to come wi’out ane!”

Then I presented him. The hostess caught his name, for a wonder.

“MacWaugh! It is a family name I know so well. How charming it would be if you were related to the Marquis of Tilliewhangan!”

“I have that disadvantage,” said The MacWaugh, “for the man is a wild ranting creature, abandoned to drink and dissipation, and a disgrace to a sober family. It is, however, but a cousinship,” said The MacWaugh, “as your ladyship might infer!”

“What a quaint, delightful character!” whispered her ladyship, as The MacWaugh drew himself up and looked over the heads of the crowd. “A brother artist, you say? Distinguished, of course——” She turned to him. “My dear Mr. MacWaugh, we are all dying to know the subject of your next Academy picture. For my part, I cannot

wait until May. One little hint—one little whisper. I promise to keep counsel. You will not be adamantine!"

"Throughout a long an' uneventful career of unostentatious mediocrity," returned The MacWaugh, "it has never—to my gratitude—been lain to my charge that I ever concealed wi' my canvas a porrtion, however inconsideerable, o' the walls o' the building which the misguided ca'—in their ignorance—the Royal Academy. Year after year, thochtful judgment confirms me in the conviction that nothing possessing the faintest claim to be ca'ed a work o' Art is ever allowit to pass those porrtals. 'Abandon houp all ye that enter here.' On the day the Forr-ty invite me to walk in, I will be lossing all houp—that is, all I have left—and drowning myself, or taking to liquor, which is the same thing. But drunkenness is an abominable vice. A man must have lossed all self-respect before he will abandon himself to arr-dent spirits. Toch ! I will trouble ye to tell me the name o' the young perr-son—the young leddy in the spoonbill hat, an' the dahlia-coloured draperies, wi' iridiscent reflets on the edges o' the folds. There are a swarr-m o' young men—an' old men—about her, where she is standing under the palm-tree over there."

"That ! My dear Mr. MacWaugh, is it possible you don't know ? Where have you been hiding ?"

"I have," said The MacWaugh stolidly, "but newly returned to what is ca'ed civiliseetion. Mine has been a sojourn-r-n in savage wilds—prolonged for years. But we will not dwell upon these painfu' subjects. The young perr—leddy ?"

"Is the new musical comedy star, Miss Fannie Muel ! She took all London by storm this season with her rendering of 'Angela Bibbson,' in *The Bathing-Machine Girl*."

"Toch!" ejaculated The MacWaugh.

"She is American. But you can tell that by her accent. That *soupon* of Yankee twang is so *chic*."

"Ay!" said The MacWaugh, "when ye get the genuine arr-ticle. But a bastard combination between Cockney an' Yankee. Toch! Ye were about giving me some more information?"

"She is engaged to Lord Polkonet. The marriage is announced for June. He is extremely wealthy, I believe, but the exact amount of his inheritance escapes me at the moment."

"I will trouble ye to present me to Miss Muel," said The MacWaugh. "I would be gratified to renew my impression of the young p—lady's native country."

"Mr. MacWaugh—Miss Muel."

They were introduced. The group of men surrounding the Yankee luminary were dwarfed by the colossal frame of The MacWaugh, and dropped away, one by one.

"I am glad to be privileeged to congratulate ye upon your recent successes," said The MacWaugh—"to meet ye in a collection of curiosities into which I had penetrated by chance, as ye might say. . . . Toch! It is enough to make ye believe in Fate. So ye are from America, Miss—Muel. And how, as an obserrver, does this country strike ye in comparison wi' your native land?"

Miss Muel, who was a brilliant blonde, with a curiously fluctuating rose-tint in her pretty oval cheeks, and a curious expression in her handsome blue eyes, half of apprehension, half of defiance, guessed that she hadn't seen enough of England to judge. But everybody was awfully nice and real kind, and as gifted and artistic as they could be.

"Toch! I am glad ye have a feeling for the arr-tistic," said The MacWaugh. "Though Bohemian life will be a sealed book to you, no doubt. Painters and their ram-

shackle ways—ye would be repelled, be brought in contact with the actual life of what is commonly called Arr-t. A dingy barr-n of a room wi' a glass roof, dusty canvases leaning against the wall, the remnants of a meal of cauld mutton, wi' bread and cheese, pickles—if luck's wi' you—an' porter or pale-ale bottles—empty—on a last week's tablecloth, an' Topsy Tirlepin, the model, wi' her hair down, an' an Oriental drapery about her, posing, wi' an African spear an' a Khirgiz Tartar shield, maybe, for Semiramis or Boadicea. Sorr-did, ye would call it," said The MacWaugh, with warmth, "and ye would be right. Better far for a young lady like yourself, reared in the lap o' luxury, never to luik at the seamy side. Better far to pay your shilling an' see Semiramis or Boadicea hanging, clean an' varnished, smug an' staring, in the Academy, than to take that disillusioning peep behind the scenes."

He remained some minutes longer in conversation with Miss Muel. He monopolised the whole of the conversation. To a listener like myself, who was aware that The MacWaugh had spent five years or so of an errant existence in America, he manifested an extraordinary ignorance with regard to that country. He wanted to know whether clams were not the principal food of the lower classes, and whether the Bowery was not a spot whither honeymooning couples resorted for sylvan quiet, and whether a "tough" was not a kind of shell-fish, and how many inches went to a "long drink," and whether molasses was not obtained—like oil—by pumping in rocky districts. A wilful light gleamed in his eye, a demon of contrariness appeared to possess him. He seemed to confuse Miss Muel, for I am bound to acknowledge that for a born and bred Yankee that fair daughter of the Stars and Stripes showed a surprisingly deficient and superficial knowledge of American manners and customs. And then little Lord Polkonet came

up, and The MacWaugh, after congratulating him warmly upon his approaching nuptials, took his leave.

"I have spent, thanks to Miss Muel," he said, "a maist entertaining afternoon." Then he turned suddenly to that brilliant exotic, who seemed to experience a certain relief, I could not but think, in the contemplation of his departure. "Toch!" he said, "I was forgetting—if charity is a virtue cultivated by young ladies—from America—there is a case I would venture to recommend ye. It is just a poor old creature, a kind of charwoman and caretaker that lives at the address I will write on this bit card—'Pagnall Court, Westminster'; a common place, as ye see, where the very puir live, herr-ded like beasts for killing. And this old woman is in sore want, and sore trouble, for she lossed her daughter six long years ago. Toch! there's not much needed in the case but a little money and a little help, maybe, in getting news o' the daughter that earr-ned her bread by sitting for the figure before she went upon the stage, and took flight across the Atlantic wi' a comic opera company, and has never written since. Six long years of neglect—they will be hard to make up for. But American ladies, I am told, are generous, and gentle wi' puir folk in trouble, and it is like there is something ye might do. . . ."

"How," I asked The MacWaugh, dropping in on him that night in a spirit of conscious patronage, "do you feel after your plunge into Society?"

He sucked his pipe thoughtfully.

"Society! I am mair than ever at a loss what the name may mean. A fat man in black at the bottom o' the staircase—a fatter woman in red at the top; a drawing-room bursting wi' a heterogeneous collection o' human curiosities—an' enthroned under a palm, wi' a dandy mob o' courtiers round her—Fanny Samuel. '*Fanny Samuel, Moddle,*

Kostum, & Figger,' she used to write upon her business carr-d. . . . Toch !” He kicked the ashes together with the toe of his clumsy boot. “ I have been thinking I was harr-d on Fanny Samuel the day. She was no’ a bad girl, as I remember her. She has sat to me for a shilling an hour when she could have had eighteenpence from another man.”

“ You don’t mean—that Miss Muel—— ?”

“ Shorn of the first twa letters—the name does weel enough for an American. Ay, Fanny was a model o’ mine seven years ago. There are studies of her drifting round the dealers now wi’ my name to them. She was no’ so smairst as she is now, but younger and fresher—a guid specimen o’ the blonde Jewess. Her father was a decent brick-layer; her mother was caretaker o’ a house in the West End. And Fanny had a voice, and plenty of spirit, and entertained ambitions to succeed on the stage. . . . Weel, she has fulfilled them ! And as the cause o’ Moraleety possesses small interest for me, I will no’ ask how ? But it is to be houped she will gang an’ see her poor auld mother. As to the little Viscount—an’ I have seen a handsomer monkey wi’ an orr-gan—I canna’ find it in my hairt to peety him. He has probably desairr-ved his doom.”

A NURSERY TEA

THE driver of the rakish yellow dog-cart, hired from the "Bluntell Arms," a white-faced tavern opposite the railway terminus four miles away, pulled up the lean-barrelled chestnut mare at a sign from the passenger, and touched the brim of his dusty bowler hat as the gentleman got down at the park gates of Fawncourt. The lodge-keeper's wife came out, wiping the soap-suds from her wrinkled hands, and opened the great wrought-iron gates for the visitor, and he passed in under the shield of the three wyverns rampant, and the cross crosslets, and the proud motto, *Sic fidem teneo*. He saw the gilding was tarnished and the metal rusted, and that one of the weather-stained limestone wyverns on the gate pillars had lost a leg, and he had a disgusted eye for the newly-washed garments of both sexes hung unblushingly to dry upon the rhododendrons as he threw the lodge-woman a shilling and walked rapidly into the avenue.

The park was rough and wild, and full of ancient, rugged oaks and beeches, the gardens were a sweet wilderness of autumn roses and tall white lilies within rankly-flourishing box borders. And then came the house—a Tudor building of ancient red brick, faced with creamy stone, standing on fair uncut lawns, drowsing in the rich black shadows flung by ancient cedars and giant yews.

The gentleman—a personable figure of a man—tall, lean, square-shouldered, and fashionably dressed—mounted the two wide steps shadowed by the double-columned portico, and would have rung the bell or plied the heavy copper

knocker, but that he perceived in time the door was ajar. He pushed it with his stick and went into a vestibule paved with black and white Italian marble. A long oaken bench, dark with time, ran along the wall, dust obscured its polish at either end, in the middle was a clean patch. Here rested a man's hat, a sunburnt straw with a soiled London University ribbon. A hunting-crop, badly used, lay on the floor. And clumping boot-soles came clattering down-stairs. The cold blue eyes lifted as the door in the screen swung open, and calmly inspected the face of the newcomer, a short, weather-beaten man of forty-five in a well-worn Norfolk suit of gray tweed.

"This is not yours, I think ?" The voice was cultivated and rather musical, the tone languid and chill.

The short man picked up his old hunting-crop and put on the scorched hat. Then he looked at his watch, a handsome gold chronometer attached to a shabby strap, and clacked his tongue against his palate, and slipped the watch back into his pocket, and was going out into the fragrant sunshine, when a question from the other stopped him.

"Are you Mr. Fladwheat's agent ?"

"I am—not," said the short man in tweeds, shortly.

"You don't happen to belong to the Estate Office at W—— ?"

"No."

"Pardon me. Not by any chance a representative of the *County Chronicle*—are you ?"

"Not by any chance."

"Then," persisted the tall, well-dressed gentleman with the thin lips and cold blue eyes, "if I may venture upon another question, What were you doing upstairs ?"

The short man in tweeds was plainly annoyed. His weather-beaten face grew red as he turned upon the persistent stranger.

" You want to know what I was doing upstairs ? Visiting an old patient."

" Indeed. Then—you are—I presume you are—the medical practitioner who succeeded to old Dr. Carberry's practice——"

" Fifteen years ago, Sir Wilfrid."

The tall, thin gentleman frowned.

" A man who wants to preserve an incognito ought not to be the image of his father," said the Doctor coolly. " I met the late Baronet—in my business capacity—twelve years ago. He had run down with some friends for the shooting—an attack of rheumatic gout——"

" My father was a chronic sufferer from rheumatic gout in his later years," said the late Baronet's successor. " It touched his heart towards the end. He let the old place get into a devil of a state," he commented in a low, absent voice. " And the people who have rented it for shooting have made bad worse. And, now——"

" And now it is on the market," said the Doctor, raspingly.

" Continuing the realisation of my—my—of my late father's estate," said the other, sweeping his cold eyes back from the sunny world outdoors to the wall immediately above the Doctor's head. " Messrs. Bewis and Moseley will sell the property for me at Tokenhouse-yard on Saturday next at twelve. The reserve price of the mansion-house, gardens, and park-land is seventeen thousand. So, Doctor, if you contemplate an investment——" He shrugged in infinite contempt.

" I'm a poor man," the Doctor flashed back, " but if I had the money I would buy Fawncourt to-morrow. Not to save it from the creditors." Sir Wilfrid Bluntell, drawing diagrams on the dusty pavement with the end of his slim umbrella, raised his eyebrows interrogatively, still perusing

the wall above the Doctor's head. "Not for my own sake—what are historic bricks and ancient acres and three-hundred-year-old oaks to me? Not for my wife's sake—I'm a confirmed bachelor—but for *hers*." He jerked his worn hunting-crop towards the heavy beams and ancient mouldings of the ceiling.

"Might one be permitted to ask who *she* is?" said the Baronet's smooth voice.

"She is my patient," said the Doctor, shortly. "You know her—or you have good reason to! And her name is Hannah Brown."

Sir Wilfrid's cold blue eyes dropped from the wall above his head and questioned him. "Hannah Brown. . . . Do you mean Nurse Brown? . . . Nurse Brown! . . . Why . . . I thought she . . . I supposed she was dead, like Hurst, the butler, and all the other old people. Alive! . . . By Jove! she must be a hundred if she's a day."

"As a fact, she is ninety," said the Doctor.

Sir Wilfrid went on without hearing. "She was laundry-maid in my grandfather's time, she nursed my father, he was always 'Master Reginald' to her, the pattern-boy held up to us"—he grinned a little. "She was head nurse when we—when we were kids. Nurse Hannah Brown—Nurse Brown." His face was creased into quite a boyish smile. His cold eyes had a twinkle. "How I used to worry her—up to all kinds of mischief, and dragging Gerry—" He broke off. "What you tell me is very interesting," he added, nonchalantly. "I must go up and see the old lady before I leave. Frankly, I ran down to look over the old house before the sale; there are several bits of rare old china and carved oak presses which would fetch rattling prices at Christie's. As for books—the library was a desert in my time, with *Spectators* for palm-

trees and Malory's *King Arthur*—the one well not brackish. Do you happen to know——”

“ I happen to know one thing,” said the Doctor stiffly, “ and that concerns my patient.”

“ Nothing much the matter there, I hope ?” said Sir Wilfred.

“ Old age,” blurted out the Doctor with resentful eyes, gleaming through his spectacles, “ and poverty and semi-starvation. Will you understand what I mean to convey, Sir Wilfred Bluntell, or do you mean to play a comedy of ignorance with me ? Since Sir Reginald left Fawncourt fifteen years ago, with glib promises and kind words, and hearty handshakes, and all the pinchbeck trash that she has always taken for pure gold, not a penny of her poor pension of £30, once her yearly wage, has ever been paid. But for charity, sir—*charity*—she would have died of want, and so I tell you to your face !”

“ Your method of communicating the intelligence is offensive,” said Sir Wilfred, “ but I give you credit for meaning well. As to Nurse Brown, I should have thought that in her seventy-four years of service she would have managed to save, to put by, to accumulate a considerable provision——”

The Doctor was foaming now. He gesticulated wildly with the hand that held his hunting-crop, and his small angry eyes snapped sparks. “ So she had. Aye, aye ! ‘ Saved,’ ‘ put by,’ ‘ accumulated ’ some £700. Hurst—old Hurst, the butler—made her buy Consols—she’d be getting some £21 the year—enough to keep body and soul together —just—her pension being forgotten by the family.”

“ Well ??”

“ Well !” The Doctor was now at white heat. “ What else could one expect ? Mind, she never uttered one complaint—I wormed the story out of her, inch by inch. The

year before Sir Reginald died, down comes Mr. Gerald Bluntell——”

“ My brother Gerald ?”

“ Yes. By the Lord ! and proud would I be if he was mine. She cried for joy when he came to pay her a visit in the old nursery in the east wing there, and asked her to make him tea—in the same little old brown teapot he remembered. Boyhood’s recollections—old ties—present troubles—pressing creditors to satisfy, no use going to Sir Reginald—ruin impending, in fact, which might be averted by a sum of ready money—nothing less than £700——”

“ Spare me the *réchauffage* of Mr. Bluntell’s misdeeds,” said Sir Wilfrid, with a slight protesting gesture of his gloved hand. “ As to his usage of this old servant of our family, it is strictly in accordance with his character. I say no more and no less. My own affairs are—somewhat in confusion. All property that is not strictly entailed upon my son is to be sold. I cannot restore the old woman’s money—even if I would. And I live in Paris; I have no home to offer her here. But when she is removed from Fawncourt—and it is necessary and advisable that she should go at once—a home shall be found for her in the village. She is already indebted to you for certain kind offices, I understand; perhaps you would not object to take charge of this ?”

But the Doctor waved away the crackling £5 note.

“ Give it her yourself, my good sir, since I understand your intention is to look in upon the poor old forgotten creature. But unless you desire to be guilty of her death say nothing about removing her to another home. This house has been her home for seventy-four years. She blossomed in its prime, and has fallen into decay with it. Ninety years old, and incredibly frail and feeble, she has not stirred out of the old nursery in the east wing for ten

years or more. Pulse a mere thread—the heart's action liable to stop at any moment. . . . That she should have lived so long, and under such conditions, is a marvel, but there's lasting stuff in good old yeoman stock unvitiated by centuries of aristocratic vice and high-bred intemperance. Now remember—I have warned you!"

The Doctor's overworked straw hat was dabbed upon his head, the Doctor's heavy boots clumped away in the direction of the stable.

Sir Wilfrid shrugged his shoulders and pushed open the heavy wrought door in the carved screen, which would have to go with the other fixtures, otherwise . . . "Worth £1,000," he said, with a little vexed whistle, as he passed through the semi-gloom of the hall, with its trophies of the chase and stands of rusted armour, and began the ascent of the great oaken staircase in a shaft of silvery-golden sunlight falling from the high mullioned windows on the landing. He mounted another staircase, the carpet under his feet ageing as he climbed, and turned down a well-remembered passage lighted by leaded casements. This was the oldest portion of the house. There were double doors at the passage-end, covered with faded green baize. They parted as Sir Wilfrid looked, and a rosy-cheeked country girl in a print dress and sun-bonnet came out, carrying a cup and plate. Her brown eyes widened at sight of the strange gentleman; she dipped a curtsey, village style, as she slid by. Sir Wilfrid guessed her to be a niece or daughter of the caretaker. He went into the room.

It was low-pitched, panelled shoulder-high with blackened oak, and the plaster of walls and ceiling was cracked and browned with age, and mouldy in patches with damp. There was a lofty oaken chimney-piece, its pillars and centre-board scored with generations of initials burned in

by childish hands, probably with the same little worn, bent poker that had always hung on a corner of the rusty, wrought-iron guard. Three casemented windows, whose cracked or broken panes had been pasted over with paper and rag, gave outlook to the south upon quiet, sloping lawns, browned with the fallen needles from giant cedars, whose sun-gilded trunks made the pillars of a Druid temple, roofed with their spreading boughs and sombre, spice-smelling foliage. And the door of an inner room, once the night-nursery, stood open, revealing three little rusty cot-beds in a row, and a heavy wooden cradle, with a broken rocker. A small fire burned between the wide hobs of the Queen Anne grate, and a small kettle sang upon it just as it used to sing, and Nurse Brown sat in a red-covered winged chair, her frail, old hands, with their idle knitting-pins, lying placid in her lap, her peaked chin sunk in the hollow of her bosom. There was no doubt of the "poverty," the "privations" of which the Doctor had spoken.

The man who looked on her had been her nursling and her darling, her tyrant and her god, as had his father before him. Some long atrophied fibre stirred in his cold, narrow heart, his hard eyes softened and grew kind. He felt almost tender towards this old, worn-out link with the old worn-out days. At the same time he shrank almost with dread from the idea of touching her. To be hugged, to be wept over!—the thought was almost unbearable; and yet he had sat upon those knees and kissed those withered lips, forty-five years ago. Nurse Brown had been a personable, buxom woman then, with brown hair only getting gray under her smart lace cap, and singularly bright, black eyes. A little smack of the country-side had flavoured her speech, plenty of good, shrewd common sense was wont to be upon her tongue, a homely humour modified her outlook upon the world, a homely loyalty was in her single-hearted belief

in the goodness, virtue, nobility, beauty of every individual member of the Bluntell family, the "flower of the flock," as she repeatedly assured his descendants, having been her own first nursling, Master Reginald. Now, here she sat, that faithful-serving soul—forgotten, bereft, unpitied. . . . It was a damned shame—a—

But Nurse Brown's bright, black eyes were open and looking at him

"Master Wilfrid. . . . My own dear boy!"

Nurse Brown had got out of her chair somehow, and ran towards him, feebly and with outstretched hands. He caught them in his as she stumbled and seemed about to fall. They seemed to dissolve in his grasp for very frailness, as he led her back to her chair. She shed a few tears there. The sight of him was good for sore eyes, she said, as she wiped her own.

"And you're the first to come, as I knew you would Master Wilfrid." Her voice was a little tremulous, and thinner, but very like the voice that Sir Wilfrid remembered. He pulled up a chair and sat down, smiling, for the languid cynicism and flippant indifference of his former mood had fallen from him. He felt, sitting in the old Fawncourt nursery with the humble, homely creature at whose knee he had faltered his first petition to a Father in heaven, that it would have been well if his children had had a better earthly one.

"And you're the first. The eldest always sets an example. . . . When I look up and see you—There! I says, as was promised, my dear boy. And then Miss Gertrude and Master Gerald—and I forget what came next; but Him as the Rector comes regular to read about and talk of—and may He bless him for being that good to an old useless woman—He never breaks His word."

"She wanders a little," thought the man, as the brief,

ecstatic smile faded from the keen-featured old face and a look of distress took its place. "Poor old soul!" Aloud he asked, "What is the matter?"

"The bit o' fire . . . going black out under the kettle . . . this day of all days, when my three children will be a-wanting o' their tea." There was a quaver in the old voice that heralded tears, and Sir Wilfrid made haste to say—

"Don't worry. Leave it to me—I'll make it burn up all right."

"Maybe there's a bit o' wood in the cupboard side of chimney," said Nurse Brown, cheering. "Mrs. Pretty, the caretaker, she brings me a bundle every now an' then, or send it by her little gell. A good gell, Rhoda is, but too fond o' ribbons to please me. Do ye be careful, Master Wilfrid—you was always so venturesome wi' matches."

Sir Wilfrid, with an appearance of great absorption in the task, had found and stuck some little bits of dry apple-wood under the kettle, and was now drawing up the leaping spirelets of wavering green flame by dexterous use of a silk handkerchief.

"A fire's a treat to me," said Nurse Brown, "in these pinched days; though I've nothing to complain of—don't ye ever dream that, Master Wilfrid. There has been family i'barrassments—law troubles and such—or my Master Reginald—the first of them I nursed—would niver have forgot me. My Miss Gertrude!"

She had risen and stood upright, holding by the arm of her chair, her bright eyes fixed upon the door.

"There is nothing," said Sir Wilfrid. "You fancied you heard a footprint, that was all."

But Nurse Brown was obstinate, if the term can be applied to anything so feeble and soft and frail.

"Bless the boy!" she said with a gentle laugh, "does he suppose I don't know my own sweet girl's footprint from

out among them all?—and there are hundreds of footsteps in this house, dear, of folks I know, and used to know, and others, dear, that were before me. Now it draws nearer. And now it's in the corridor—not so light as when she was a young thing, and danced because she was too full o' life to walk—but a firm, free step. . . . Now the swing-doors, and now—her knock. Oh, my dear love, come in!"

Someone had actually knocked, and Sir Wilfrid leapt up, oversetting his chair, and breaking its worm-eaten back. The door opened, and a handsome woman crossed the threshold, and, with a little cry, stepped forward and embraced Nurse Brown, whose shrunken figure almost vanished amongst her chiffons and laces.

" You dear old, old thing!" the newcomer gushed, and kissed the wrinkled cheek in a delicate, pecking, Society way. " Now, don't cry," she said, " I haven't much time to spend here." Then she recognised the tall, lean figure of the elder brother, whose cold blue eyes and thin, straight features bore much resemblance to her own. " Wilfrid! You here? How odd!" she uttered, with a little agitated catch of her breath.

" How are you, Gertrude?" he said, awkwardly for him, and came to her, offering his hand. She smiled wryly as she took it, for he had commanded his wife to " drop Gertrude" when Mrs. Consterdine had elected to burn her boats and leave her husband for Lord Vibart, and the sum total of Wilfrid's own conjugal errors had but recently been added up by a British jury.

" Poor Millicent!" Lady Vibart had commented, " spending all that time and all that money in getting twelve men to agree that Wilfrid is to keep his distance—when he has never done anything else." Now she said, in response to her brother's stiff greeting, " Oh, clinking! and so is Vibart, thanks," and she smiled again, more naturally,

as she unwound the latest thing in automobile veils, and tossed it upon the table.

" You came down by road, I see ?" her brother said.

" In Savarny's ' Napier,' " returned Lady Vibart, looking straight into her brother's eyes. " I had seen in yesterday's *Times* that Fawncourt was to be sold. I had had an idea that I should like to see the old place again—and—here I am."

" You have not brought Savarny ?" said Sir Wilfrid.

" I have left him at the Stag and Arrow in the village," Lady Vibart said, " trying to order luncheon in what he believes to be English learned from me."

" I hope you will draw the line at learning from him any more of what you believe to be French," said Sir Wilfrid.

Lady Vibart showed her excellent white teeth in response, and dropped a little mocking curtsey.

" *Merci, mon cher !* The caution comes admirably well from you !"

" Hush !" he said.

But thrust, parry, and riposte had glanced beside the true heart that had loved these worldly ones from birth. " Come, sit you down, my dear love," said Nurse Brown, fondling the jewelled hand that had grown cold between hers. " And, Master Wilfrid, you should never speak unkind to your sister. I mind, and so should you, how she cried outside the door when you was down wi' the measles, and broke open her money-box to buy you a new fishing-rod when you got well."

A less unfriendly look was interchanged between both pairs of cold blue eyes. The woman's glance asked, " Is she quite childish ?"

The man replied:—

" Far from it. She only occasionally confuses the Present with the Past."

The quavering old voice rose again:—

“ You’ll kiss each other, dears, like a good boy and girl. Otherwise the tea won’t draw and there’ll be no sugar on the bread-and-butter.”

“ You always used to say that, you dear old thing, when we were naughty,” Lady Vibart cried. She straightened the poor shabby cap, and patted the old, worn, veinous hands. “ And where is the tea ? I’m parched—simply.”

“ Drat my head—I’ve never wetted it !” The Nurse Brown of the past was revivified from the ashes of the present. She sprang erect, renewed, to minister to her nurslings’ needs. Age fell from her like a discarded shawl. Spellbound they sat and watched her as she bustled to the cupboard where the caddy lived; it was the little black japanned one they remembered of old. She drew a crusty loaf from a biscuit-tin, she produced butter from a jam-pot, she conjured from various hiding-places plates, cups, knives, teaspoons, a teapot, sugar. To and fro, to and fro between the table and the cupboard and the fireplace the bent figure journeyed, intent on service, unconscious of toil. The kettle boiled, the teapot was warmed, the infusion made. Triumphant she bade them draw to the table, spread with all her scanty store.

“ And manners, my dearies, remember. If I’m humble myself, I know how my betters should behave. Yes, Master Wilfrid, you may cut the bread. Miss Gertrude likes to butter it—there’ll only be brown sugar on the second slice. When you’re grand grown man and woman you’ll remember how happy you made yourselves in the old Fawncourt nursery, with Nurse Brown, and a bit o’ bread-and-butter, and a cup o’ tea.”

“ Dear old thing ! I have often—often remembered it,” said Lady Vibart, with a sigh.

“ And so has Master Wilfrid . . . and so has my boy

Gerald. There ! to think of me forgetting my boy. Whatever can have come to him ?”

Nurse rose as though to run in search.

“ Sit down . . .” said Sir Wilfrid, falling unconsciously into schoolboy idiom in humouring her. “ Gerry’s all right. You’ll see him presently, as safe as houses.”

“ Oh, Will !” his sister protested, below her breath.

“ He’s watching the fallow deer, or the big pike in the pond, with them big bright eyes of his,” said Nurse Brown, putting the teapot to stand on the hob for “ her boy,” and reserving a Benjamin’s portion of bread-and-butter. “ The Lord behears the prayers I put up that no harm may come to him. When you grows up, Master Wilfrid, love, you’ll have your seat in the House of Commons like your grandfather, and make the longest and grandest speeches, you will, on every subject that can be brought up, without committing your party, as I’ve heard it called, to anything whatsumever. But Master Gerry will be a—what do they call the gentleman with the laurel wreath as Queen Victoria pays thousands a year to for writing poetry ?”

“ Laureate,” suggested Lady Vibart.

“ And that’s what my sweet boy will be, Heaven ever bless him !” said Nurse proudly. “ You’ll be married, Miss Gerty, dear, before Master Gerry is crowned; but mark my words, the day will come. And you’ll be only less proud of your brother then than you will be of your husband. He’ll be dark-complexioned as you are fair, and you’ll bring the dear babe down to Fawncourt to get the country air and sleep in the old nursery; and a good mother you’ll make, love, that are that fond of your dolls to-day.”

“ My God, my God !” broke from Lady Vibart in a suffocated voice, “ why was I so mad as to come here ? Why—— ?”

"Pull yourself together," said Sir Wilfrid, leaning to her ear. "Brave it out—lie, act as women can. It is the one thing we can do for her—never to let her guess the truth. Do you know what she has suffered at our hands? Gerald stole her savings, our father ceased to pay her poor pension long before he died——"

"Impossible! Oh, Will, say it is not true!"

"I—damn me for it!—forgot her. So did you."

"I—I am afraid I did!" admitted Lady Vibart.

Sir Wilfrid went on: "But for the Doctor's charity—but for the Doctor's help she would have *died*. What's that?"

"That" was another step upon the landing, a new touch upon the rattling handle of the door. Lady Vibart rose with a little cry of recognition. Sir Wilfrid sat still as stone.

"Shut the door behind you, Master Gerald, there's my own boy," said Nurse in a tone of calm authority, "and put down your hat, and come to the table. Your tea's a-waiting and your bread-and-butter's cut."

"And I'm confoundedly hungry and infernally thirsty," said the prodigal, accepting the invitation.

"Don't let me hear you make use of grown gentlemen's bad language again, Master Gerald," warned Nurse Browne, returning from the hob, teapot in hand, "or I shall be compelled to put you to bed without your tea. Make room for your brother, do, Miss Gerty, and hand him the bread-and-butter."

"She's awfully old!" said Gerald Bluntell under his breath. "It frightens me to look at her—by Jove, it does!"

"I am glad to hear you have so much conscience left," said Lady Vibart icily.

"What do you mean? What the—what do you mean?" snarled the prodigal.

"Now, that's not pretty, Master Gerald, my lamb, to talk to your sister so," said Nurse Brown, and the lamb subsided with a scowl. "And you know he was a weakly babe, Miss Gerty, and your dear, sweet mother, my blessed lady now with Them above—made you promise to be a kind elder sister to your little brother. I can see my lady now, leaning back amongst her great embroidered pillows, with her big, bright eyes shining like stars, and her colour as pink as roses, and the little lace shawl—French lace, hundreds of years old—tied over her lovely head. And every night she prayed on her two knees that her three children might grow up good."

The shadows without had grown longer, the sunlight mellower and less intense. An owl, waking from the daylight sleep, swooped noiselessly from one tree into another, and the shrill, alarmed protest of an angry mother-bird followed on the predatory visit.

"She'll be afeard for her nestlings, poor thing!" said Nurse Brown, who had returned to the red arm-chair, after offering that throne successively to each of her visitors, "and well she may. They be silly-looking, hock-nosed things by day, they owls, though bodeful and dreadsome enough on moonlight nights, the screechers specially. I had a nursery-maid in your dear father's time, my children, that was mortal afeard o' owls. Rhoda Pretty, the gell as does my bit o' marketing, be her granddaughter, and nigh as skeery. Eh, dears, what days they was to be sure! The head nurse, whose place I got after, and me as second, the nursery-maid, and a scrubbing-maid, that was the nursery staff. And Sir Reginald, the loveliest boy with the flaxenest curls that ever was a nurse's pride. None of his children had his pretty ways or his tender heart—though I say it to your faces, dears!"

"Fancy the old governor!" said the prodigal under his

breath, "with pretty ways and a tender heart. Good Lord!" he chuckled drearily.

"Bless him! I thought he never would a-done mourning over the leg o' mutton for the nursery dinner that had once belonged to a live sheep." Nurse Brown's flow of reminiscence was interrupted by a yawn.

"We have tired you," said Lady Vibart gently, drawing a stool to the side of the red arm-chair. She remembered Savarny, waiting at the inn in the village, she wished intensely to escape from the stinging memories and gnawing regrets that hived under the roof of Fawncourt—she bitterly upbraided herself for having had the idiocy to come; and yet—she looked at the prodigal, and refrained from taking leave. Some latent instinct of protection towards the feeble, childish, trusting creature who had already suffered plunder at his greedy hands—might suffer it again—awakened in her. Tardy gratitude for all the wealth of love, all the treasures of loyalty and fidelity hung like despised garlands about such worthless necks, outpoured at such shapeless feet of vulgar clay, moistened her cold eyes and melted her frozen heart. She gulped a little sob and fumbled for her handkerchief—an absurd square inch of gossamer cambric, bordered with a frill. She did not waste time in regretting the past, but she wished that things had been different! Dim-eyed, she reached forth to touch the withered hand, and found it covered by another—Wilfrid's! and the prodigal Gerald was sitting on a ragged hassock at Nurse Brown's feet.

"This is like blessed old times," said Nurse Brown, "wi' all my children round me. 'Twas promised—and I knew the promise would be kept—as I should have this good hour—and now it has come to me. All my children—that is, saving one. And him——"

"What was that?"

"What was what, Miss Gerty, dear ?" asked Nurse.

Lady Vibart had uttered the exclamation. "It is quite absurd," she said with a little empty laugh, "and I know my nerves must have played me a trick, but a child in a little old-fashioned white pelisse and tartan sash actually peeped in at us just now from the old night nursery."

"A neighbour's child—possibly the caretaker's," said Sir Wilfrid, clearing his throat.

"Perhaps. . . . Ah ! there it is again. No, it has gone !"

"A white embroidered frock and a Rob-Roy sash and yellow curls, pale, like ripe barley, not gold, like corn, had he ?" said Nurse Brown, smiling wisely inside her cap-border.

"That's the kiddy," assented the prodigal. "I saw him as well as Gerty. Looked round the door and laughed . . . and then dodged back again. I hear him chuckling now, I'm almost certain."

"Take no notice, and maybe he'll come out," said Nurse. "Twould be hard if my own boy were kep' back, when the promise was for all. By-and-by, when the sun has wested and the shadows get longer, he'll grow more venturesome. I've heerd him behind my chair—ah ! a many, many times; but when I turns, sweet love, he's always hiding. Tell me if you sees him again, dear !"

"She means our father," Sir Wilfrid whispered to Lady Vibart.

Nurse Brown—strangely keen of hearing and alert of perception in this her hour of joy—gave a little triumphant laugh.

"To be sure ! My own boy—the first of all I nursed—who should I mean else ? It's wonderful the love a woman can feel for them she never bore. Even if ye had grown up warped and blighted, cold-hearted, bad-natured, wicked,

instead of noble, good, grand, 'twould be all the same to me. What I lulled to sleep in my old arms and saw thrive under my fostering, could I ever come to hate it ? And that's how the Lord above looks upon His children. Eh, loves, 'tis getting dark."

A flash of lightning pierced the gathering gloom with a shaft of fierce blue radiance, and a rushing pattering sound of heavy rain followed the dull boom of distant cloud-artillery.

"When this is over I must positively escape," reflected Lady Vibart, and the panes streamed and the roof-gutters vomited. The half-admitted dread of the lonely journey through the deserted corridors, down the wide desolate staircases, the semi-conscious fear of meeting—something ! made her draw her laces and chiffons closer about her, and hope that Wilfrid would in decency propose to see her to the door. As for Gerald, how could she hope to prevent him from carrying out whatever purpose he had in view ? If he chose to remain—remain he must. The results of the raid would be discouraging enough to prevent his making another, and to-morrow—welcome to-morrow !—she would send Nurse enough money to keep the dear old thing in comfort for a decent time. But how dark it was ! and how the rain poured and beat against the casements and clanked upon the flagstones of the terrace far below ! Cool earth-odours, spicy cedar-smells stole in from the wet outer world mingling with the suggestions of dry-rot, the palpable hints of mice, the dampness that the little dying fire in the Queen Anne grate had no power to conquer. She shivered. A vision rose before her of dear, wet autumns, long, freezing winters, nipping, piercing springs spent in this place, alone, by this old, old feeble woman. Scarce fed, clothed in garments as ancient as her remembrances, less lasting than her faithful love. A rigor of

cold and horror seized her, she shivered again, setting her teeth, and shutting her eyes and hands. In the increasing gloom so acute was her sense of desolation that she moved nearer to her brother Wilfrid, and was sensible that he drew closer to her. At last she touched his shoulder, and he put his arm about her. And the Prodigal, presuming but unrebuked, leaned his fast grizzling head against his sister's knee. So like, but so different to, the group that had gathered here in the old days when they were "Will" and "Gerty" and "Gerry" to each other, and Fawn-court was their Paradise, into which no serpent had entered yet. So changed and yet so much the same, they sat together now. A common love had stirred in their cold breasts, however faintly, a common sympathy had moved them, a regret had been shared, a remorse had stung them equally; an unacknowledged awe, a secret terror of unknown powers that might be gathering round them in the shadows united them in a common bond. Children again, they huddled together in the semi-obscurity—these three who were to go upon their way so shortly, uttering cold farewells, never to meet again on earth. They stilled their breathing and listened, and could have sworn to footsteps on the stairs, to voices in the corridors, to strains of music—once to a burst of laughter—that came pealing upwards from the locked-up, shuttered dining-room. Time passed, the rain had ceased, the sun had set, and the sky was a lake of pale rosy yellow behind the black umbrage of the dripping cedars.

"What a strange shadow—there upon the floor . . ."

One of the three Bluntells had spoken, or none. The uttered words might have been the crystallised thought of all three brains. But Nurse made answer:

"It be, my love. It have frightened me by times when it took shape like that. Whether 'tis the shadow of the

gable over window or what else I never guess. Black, and long and heavy, with an edge of clear light. And the shape of a bier. And a figure on it with a face; there now—it's edge to me! And I seems sometimes to know whose it is, and sometimes not. Last time it came it were my boy, your dear father, Sir Reginald, lie there so still. And now—! See, dear loves, it be a woman . . . a-lying like a carved stone queen upon a monument, a-waiting for the Last Trump to stir the dust an' bid the dry bones live. And but that I never was so grand, my children, I'd say it were myself."

Silence again fell and the rose-yellow sky grew gray, a north wind swayed the cedar branches, and the last drops trickled from the gargoyle-mouthed roof gutters. The last spark of the fire died out, the cold shadows gathered closer. Then Lady Vibart called out suddenly in sharp alarm:

"How strangely she is breathing! Strike a light, if either of you have matches. Nurse! Nurse Brown!"

"I will send for the Doctor," said Sir Wilfrid hurriedly, as the vesta scraped and flared and burned out, and the hand that he had lifted fell inertly from his own. But the bright black eyes opened a moment later, and—

"My boy a-orying," said Nurse. "Why frightened of the dark, my love, and me so near? I'm a-coming, Master Reginald! I'm a-coming, my love. . . . That were the promise, after long waiting—as I should go—wi' all my—children by. The Lord bless my dear loves, my kind loves—that came before—the end!"

The worn old body quivered, and the last breath went out in a happy sigh, as Nurse laid down the burden of her many years, and went upon her way.

THE SELF-DENIAL OF THE MACWAUGH

IT was towards the close of a long, dry, baking summer when the spotted flag of a dread invader was hoisted over certain London courts and alleys. The horror spread, even to the high-lying, reputedly healthy districts neighbouring the Regent's Park. People who could afford it migrated hastily to country cottages or villas by the sea; the inhabitants of North-West Studios joined in the general exodus. With the solitary exception of The MacWaugh, who remained stationary, from mingled impecuniosity and indifference.

"They say," said Millars, the last to take flight, "that there are two cases of smallpox in Cranley Street, that beastly semi-mews that runs under your bedroom windows and mine, you know. But it is all right, there's nothing to be alarmed about."

The MacWaugh looked an interrogation.

"I'm off to-day," said Millars, pointing to an agglomeration of portmanteaux, portable easels, folding umbrellas, and painting-stools, rods, rugs, sticks, and umbrellas, displayed upon the asphalte in front of his green door, "to the Scilly Isles, and you may be quite sure I shall not come back until this confounded scare is over."

"Your deterr-mination," said The MacWaugh, "relieves my mind o' a profound anxiety." Then, as wheels rumbled in the brick-walled tunnel that leads from the studio-quadrangle to the outer world, he continued: "There will be no manner o' doubt that, possessing as ye do the qualities o' coolness an' firmness to a degree unusual in the case o'

a young man, ye will have taken measures to securre a properly disinfected vehicle. *Huts!*" he exclaimed, as the four-wheeler emerged into sight. "I would no' have believed that there could be mair than one cabdriver in the length an' breadth o' London wi' a nose so much resembling to an ower-ripe tomato. Though there is this conseederation weighing against prejudice—the man may be ane o' twins."

"I say!" Millars exclaimed, as the subject of the discussion dismounted from the box and proceeded to load the roof of the vehicle with packages. "What on earth are you driving at?"

"Driving was no' the terr-m," said The MacWaugh composedly. "It was juist crawling along, up the Highgate Road—ye are aware there is a fever hospital at Highgate? —an' a narr-se let down the window. . . . Toch! . . . It was just a glimpse o' blankets I was catching!—and she ca'ed to the driver, a man wi' a nose the fellow to that . . ." —he indicated the exuberantly-tinted feature to which he had at first drawn Millar's attention. "'*Dinna hurry*,' or something to that effect. '*Ye are shaking the patient*,' and he said, '*Am wishing I could shake mysel' out o' the job!*' And so, unless this perr-son owns a twin brother—in the same profession—ye might be only taking a reasonable precaution in sitting on the box."

But Millars sent away that cab, and procured another, and sat on the box even then.

"If I were a Catholic, now," said The MacWaugh, repentantly yet with a vagrant twinkle in his gray eye, denoting appreciation of the humour of the departure, "I would be doing penance for that joke. Not being even a member o' the Free Church, I must juist be thinking out a way o' making up the loss o' that shilling to Millars."

He took a turn or two up and down the deserted court-

yard. Dust and withered leaves lay, drifted thick, in quiet corners, the soil of the grass-plots was cracked, and scorched, and brown. Even the purple clematis drooped thirstily against its background of parched ivy; only the sunflowers in the borders stood up stiffly, tilting their brown and yellow faces to the flaring brazen sky.

“It is a degrading deeth to dee,” commented The MacWaugh, following up a train of thought which his recent conversation with Millars had set going. “A slovenly, untidy kin’ o’ deeth. Ay ! an’ to add the last drop of asafœtida to the gruesome cup—ye are not even allowed to carry aff matters by yoursel’ decently, in your ain corr-ner; but, in the interests o’ the community, ye are whisked awa’ to hospital, to rave an’ pray, grin an’ groan, fry an’ fester in a whitewashed ward, wi’ scores o’ other poisoned human rats around ye, an’ when ye have made your indecorous exit, be clapped into an herr-metically-sealed glass-topped coffin for your relatives to keek at before the parr-son gi’es the signal for our dear brother to be tipped in amang the quicklime. Toch ! It is an unco’ unpleasant medium o’ depairture—the smallpox,” concluded The MacWaugh, as he remounted his own doorsteps. “Now delirium tremens——! But that reminds me there is no’ a single sup o’ whisky on the premises since half an hour syne, an’ I am destitute o’ the wherewithal to remedy the deficiency !” His bloodshot eye, roving uncertainly round the barely-furnished studio, lighted upon a small glazed bookcase which still contained a few hoarded volumes.

“The thirrst for knowledge,” said The MacWaugh gravely, “balanced in the scales wi’ the thirst for arr-dent spirits, kicks the beam. The question is, which o’ these fallows can be pairted wi’ to the best disadvantage ? François Montcorbier, *alias* Villon, ye tavern-bred nightin-

gale"—he ran through the pages of the parchment-bound quarto with a lingering touch—"I am thinking your doom is sealed. That ballad o' Muckle Peg, for instance.—I have long entertained doubts o' its propriety—and I am no doubting I could repeat the whole o' it by hairt—at a pinch. And a guinea will buy five bottles o' whisky, an' leave something ower for tobacco an' the grosser requirements o' the human appetite." He replaced the volume. "Gang back to your shelf, François, my man, for the present. When it is dark—just before the shops are shut—we will tak' a constitutional together. Five bottles o' whisky ! Enough—or very nearly—to last me out the week !" He cogitated, he ruminated, sitting in his Windsor chair, and gripping his unshaven chin in one powerful fist. "That is, if I practise economy," said The MacWaugh sagely. "Toch ! They are at it again !"

The infantile population of the alley at the rear were battering—evidently with a brickbat—at The MacWaugh's back-door. They indulged in this nerve-shattering amusement—varying the factors of exasperation according to the inspiration of the moment—at all hours when not in bed or at the Board-school; until The MacWaugh, who had learned during his somewhat extended period of tenancy the uselessness of expostulation, had grown to look upon King Herod as a benefactor to the human race.

He bore the infliction upon the present occasion with less of apathy than usual, owing to the absence of the customary anodyne. At the height of exasperation-pitch, he opened a window and looked out. The infant swarm dispersed with yells and hooting. A clumsy vehicle, not unlike a piano-van, at that moment turned the corner of the shabby street. It was drawn by a stout horse, and guided by a stalwart man in leggings, whose unsteady gait and congested complexion appealed to the sympathies of a fellow-

inebriate, who, at that moment, most keenly regretted his own condition of enforced sobriety.

"He will," murmured The MacWaugh, as the van lurched from side to side of the narrow, noisome thoroughfare, and the drunken driver upbraided the sober horse for unsteadiness; "he will have begun wi' beer. Ay! Four-penny ale, well loaded wi' *cocculus indicus*, saltpetre, an' other stimulative adulterants, will be the foundation upon which the structure o' intoxication has been laid. Then it is maist probable that he will have stowed awa' a few quarterns o' gin. Unsweetened, for choice; an' after sipping, like the butterfly of poetry, at a three or two o' inferior Scotch, I would guess that he returr-ned to the beer again. Rum," said The MacWaugh, contemplatively folding his brawny arms, clad in paint-stained tweed, upon the dusty window-sill, "rum will be the coping-stone o' the edifice, under the weight o' which the architect will finally collapse. Toch! The headache that man will have upon the morrow will be unique—a rare exotic that none but an experr-t like mysel' micht daur to classify."

The van pulled up before one of the frowsy dwellings that opened on the sidewalk. The drunken driver beat thrice with the butt of his whip upon the door. The door was opened by an unseen hand—a bundle of squalid blankets was cast forth upon the pavement. The lips of The MacWaugh shaped themselves into a soundless whistle as the drunken driver unbarred the rearward doors of the van, and, gingerly lifting the bundle, tossed it inside. Millars had not been mistaken after all. The smallpox was in Cranley Street.

The van jolted on a yard or two, and stopped at another door. The official in charge, who bore in his greasy hat the badge of his calling, rapped again, and went behind the

van, and pulled out another bundle of bedding, three shades less filthy than the first, and which appeared to have undergone the process of singeing in places, and tossed it, upon the opening of the door, into the passage. The MacWaugh drew in his head for the purpose of shaking it.

There was a sudden bump at his back-door, a jingling of harness-chains, and a sound of retreating footsteps. The van with its deadly contents had been drawn up beneath his window. The placid horse munched in his nosebag, the drunken driver had vanished in quest of more beer, and the children of the neighbourhood, trooping back to their old vantage-ground, were free to nose about each pestilence-exhaling chink.

And The MacWaugh, breathing ire, sat down to write a scathing letter to the newspaper, headed "Insanitary Sanitary Precautions," and got no further than the heading, in which his inspiration seemed to begin and end. The mental effort involved made him thirsty, and the fact of there being nothing to drink made him thirstier still. It was not quite dusk when he thrust the Villon into the bulging pocket of his gray tweed jacket, took his second rustiest hat from its peg, and strode away in the direction of Oxford Street. In an hour and a half he returned, in a cab, with a freight of bottles, and the remainder of the evening and the greater part of the night were passed in solitary toping. There never was a graver reveller than The MacWaugh—a soberer drunkard might have been sought unavailingly throughout the Three Kingdoms. The drink neither maddened nor stupefied him, to all appearance, though his eyes grew bleared and bloodshot, and his rough-hewn features more lined and gray and rugged as the hours went on. He bent stern purpose to the achievement of his self-appointed task, the attainment

of alcoholic Nirvana. He laboured with grim patience to attain the end in view, and with every draught it receded farther. Forgetfulness! Forgetfulness, only for one brief hour.

Deafness to a voice, forever sounding in his ears—blindness to one face, young, hopeful, fair, vivid with the beauty of a flower, wistful, appealing, wan, worn by the canker of the malady that had slain her; stamped, in colours that might never fade, upon the tablet of remembrance.

Daylight shone bluely through the skylight window, and found the gaunt, gray man still sitting there, grimly knocking nails into his coffin. Then he rose and threw himself upon his bed, and lay there fevered, numbering the whirling minutes by the persistent ticking of some overstrained nerve in his weary brain. And then a heavy, unrefreshing sleep weighed down his parched eyelids, and he awoke to that woman's face and voice more vividly in dreams.

When he rose it was late noon. He was faint for lack of food, and so ate unrelishingly of the poor meal that had been set out by the porter's wife upon the studio table. He was dizzy and sick in body, as in soul, his hands trembled, and he walked uncertainly. As he roved to and fro from room to room, still weaving that harsh web of recollection, a whimpering sound came to his ear—some lost puppy whining in the alley where the pest-cart had passed the day before. As then, he opened his bedroom window and looked out. Something like a small bundle of rags huddled at his back-door. A frowsy woman stood regarding it, and as it broke again into its complaining whimper, and thrust a small, dirty foot from beneath its sordid coverings, he knew that it was a child.

"You'll wait there, like a good gal," said the woman, in a tone between coaxing and threatening, "or else it'll be

the worse for you. Because my place ain't none o' yours, so you must wait till the officer comes to fetch ye. You and yours brought me trouble enough, Gawd knows; and for all I can tell you may be took, like wot your mother was, afore the night——”

“ What's wrong wi' the bairn ?” queried The MacWaugh from above.

The woman, after one surly stare, yielded so far as to enlighten him. She kept a lodging-house, poor but respectable, as she took care to explain, and a woman had come to rent her ground-floor front, who had sickened of the fever there and been took away, and died in 'orspital. And this was her child, whom they had kept until the “ berril,” and who now, the room lately occupied by the dead woman being let, had no refuge but the workhouse. And the relieving officer was to have fetched her away before twelve, but hadn't, somehow, and so ended the sordid recital.

“ An' supposing he disna' come the nicht ?” hazarded The MacWaugh.

The woman turned down a mulish lip. If he didn't come, the gal would have to sit there till morning, she dared say. She would go as far as bread-and-dripping and a drop of tea, but the room was let and the new lodger nervous of illness, and she was an honest woman with a family to provide for. And repeating this final clause a great many times, she retired into her slovenly citadel and banged the door.

Then The MacWaugh drew his head in and shut the window. What had he to do with the possibly-infected rag-heap that the workhouse official had forgotten to fetch ? But the desolate whimpering broke out again. He wished the beadle, or whatever they called the fellow, would come. The whimpering swelled into a wail. The

MacWaugh was driven beyond endurance. He descended the brief stair that led to the coal-cellar, and unlocked and unbolted the back-door. The homeless bundle scrambled to its feet and stood cowering, undecided, meditating flight. It was a girl, who would have been well-grown for five years, but might have been termed undersized for seven.

"Why," asked The MacWaugh severely, "are ye cryin' that gate?"

"Wukus!" was the only answer attainable.

"As a ratepayer—an unwilling ratepayer," said The MacWaugh, "I am scandaleezed an' confounded to find in one so young so puir an appreciation o' the inestimable serr-vices rendered to the Cause o' Charity by the benevolent institution to which ye refer. But lookin' at your prospects, from a fellow-pauper's point o' view, I will admit that ye have some reason to compleen. Come in wi' ye!"

The child obeyed the pointing finger, and the tone rather than the words, and set a dusty foot upon the threshold.

"Come in awa'," said The MacWaugh; adding with infinite craft, "That is, supposin' you're the kin' o' wean that likes bread-an'-butter wi' sugar on the top," he added, prompted by the recollection of a delicacy dear to his own infancy.

The child came in, too young, or perhaps too dulled by misery, to be afraid—stood by him as he rebolted the door, and followed him upstairs, like a little stray dog. He rummaged in his pantry-cupboard and found materials to furnish the poor treat he had promised, and a tumbler half full of milk left there by Mrs. Kitt in provision for the evening. The brimming cup and the generously-spread slice he offered were regarded by the stranger-guest with wonder and doubt. Women, in her small experience, were the givers of food, and this big, gray, gaunt man . . .

"I will be eating it myself, I doubt," suggested The MacWaugh, cunningly, "if you are no' wanting it." He poised the slice in mid-air, and opened a capacious mouth. The child's dirty little face puckered apprehensively, two great gray-blue eyes, heavily valanced with black lashes, brimmed up slowly and overflowed. The MacWaugh, with a twinge of self-reproach, instantly surrendered the coveted delicacy. The wonderful gray-blue eyes laughed now, as the small white teeth took the first bite. The MacWaugh knew very well now where he had seen eyes like those before.

"Ally!" he muttered hoarsely, and the wondering child looked up. "That's no' your name?" said The MacWaugh roughly. "Dinna tell me that's your name?" But the child nodded, and he felt sure it was. Repenting somewhat of his compassionate impulse of the moment before, he returned to his original station at the bedroom window. The street lay empty, baking in the heat of late afternoon. Had the relieving-officer come and gone away again? He lighted his pipe and smoked, and mused, and watched full two hours, leaning his elbows on the dusty sill. Then twilight fell, and he drew in his head and passed into the outer studio, and, striking a match upon the sole of his clumsy boot, lighted the gas. The child lay now upon the shabby hearthrug, sleeping peacefully. The MacWaugh held his breath, and bent down and looked at the young face—beautiful in spite of disfiguring dirt. There was a flush upon the forehead; beneath the tangled dark curls and under the closed eyes were blue marks like bruises. He touched the thin little hand—it was hot and clammy. Had the dreaded "fever" marked another victim here? The MacWaugh drew up a chair noiselessly, and sat and watched a while, sucking his empty pipe. To reach his tobacco, which was upon the mantelshelf, he would have

had to step over the sleeper. In getting a fresh bottle of whisky from the corner-cupboard he ran no less risk of disturbing her by the clinking corkscrew and glass. So he stifled his imperious desire for sedative and intoxicant, and sat, a granite image of stern endurance, until she awakened of herself.

Then he went back to his Windsor chair by the fireless studio-hearth. He filled his pipe, and his thoughts reverted tenderly to the whisky in the cupboard. Four bottles yet to despatch. He had only had one the night before, feeling it necessary to observe economy. He got out the green bottle with its gold label. He uncorked it, and poured out three-quarters of a tumblerful. He lifted it to his lips—they were parched with desire of the fiery amber drink—and his nostrils expanded as he inhaled its peaty bouquet, and then he set it down, and turned with a blank face of horror to the bedroom door.

Suppose, upon this night of all nights, the liquor that ordinarily stupefied and dulled him should madden ! Suppose, possessed of the devil that urges so many millions of men all the world over to spill the red wine of life for the pleasure of seeing it blot and trickle in the dust, he were to kill the child ! Something clicked in his throat, a dull mist blurred his vision. “I know what I am, an’ am weel aware what I might be,” said The MacWaugh, brokenly, in his desolate heart.

He went in and looked at the child. So like—so like ! The half-closed hands lay like delicate shells upon the tattered little bosom, the black lashes swept the rounded cheeks, and the tumbled curls were like brown silk. He had cherished, long years before, the fair, unsubstantial vision of a child, something like this, that might have been his own if—— An “if” is generally the flaming sword that keeps us out of Paradise.

He went out into the courtyard, and the desire of the drink and the terror of it made his brain reel. He strode up and down as the stars stole out and the pansy-coloured sky-dome overhead quickened with points of multi-coloured fire. What should he do with the whisky ? Ask the porter to lock it up until the morning. He shrank from the exposure of his own pitiable weakness. The situation was ridiculous, pitiable, tragic, what you will.

He walked up and down, wrestling with his weakness, for an hour and more. His fevered brain was full of broken images, of incoherent thoughts; his lips muttered ejaculations not unlike prayer. Only a drunkard striving with the desire for drink, only a soul in deadly contest with an overwhelming temptation ! Armageddon was fought that night, and lost—and won—under the quiet stars.

He turned with a groan, at last, and strode back to the studio, creaked with clumsy caution through the little hall, vanished and reappeared again, while one might have counted six. His arms were full of bottles—bottles to buy which he had sold his Villon. He poured out the contents of one, and then, with cautious violence, he beheaded the others, one after another, against the door-scraper, and their fiery blood gurgled down the gutter that ran along the edge of the asphalte side-walk, and the sacrifice was complete.

“A waste,” said The MacWaugh, inhaling the expiring fragrance, the mere reminiscence of whisky, that lingered on the calm night air. “A throwing away, ye might ca’ it. Gude Scotch, warranted sax years in the wood. Toch ! It is a prodigal act. But the deed was imperative.” He addressed himself seemingly to the flickering gas-lamp over the gateway, which now caught the eye of The MacWaugh.

“Ye would not have a child—a young child—left alone

72 THE SELF-DENIAL OF THE MACWAUGH

in a house wi' a drunkard—a wild inebriate wi' whisky running in his veins instead o' blood ! When I am finding a home for the wee creature—a respectable decent home wi' a motherly woman that will deal with her gently—then ! Weel, then we will revenge the slaughter o' the innocents, or I have no legal claim to the name o' Alexander MacWaugh."

THE RISING GENERATION

SIR REGINALD, wrought to the heroic pitch of self-sacrifice involved in leaving his comfortable rooms in town by an urgently-worded private summons from his daughter-in-law, was relieved to find that the motor-landau in waiting for him at Covertsham Station, Deershire, was destined to receive a second passenger in the person of his son's mother-in-law, Mrs. Noriette, who, in answer to a frenzied secret appeal from her son by marriage, was about to devote three days to the ungrateful task of adjusting other people's differences. They met seldom, but the stalwart old ex-Guardsman liked Mrs. Noriette.

"Whatever killed her husband, the man didn't die of nagging!" he reflected, unconscious that after the manner of King William the Fourth of garrulous memory he uttered his thoughts aloud. Her calm face and still shapely figure, her rippling white hair, well-cut features, and luminous gray eyes were pleasing, like her sensible conversation dashed with humour that was always keen and never acid. "How she came to mother a shrieking bundle of nerves like Dick's wife is beyond me," the Baronet told himself, including the lady, as the landau turned in at the lodge gates.

A moment later, "There is Dick!" he cried cheerfully. He waved his hat to the tweed-clad figure.

"And there is Ellice!" said Mrs. Noriette, kissing her hand.

"Together!" reflected Sir Reginald aloud. "Better than I expected. Looked to find the couple camped at

opposite sides of the house, only meetin' at meals—in a temperature markin' forty degrees of frost. Breach, if any, must be a mild one—Ellice exaggerated things in her letter—and I shall be able to get back to town on Tuesday with an easy conscience. . . . Tea? Good lor', my dear Ellice, no! Tannin and cream—horrible mixture! Dick, my dear fellow, where do you keep your whisky and soda?"

And Richard bore away his progenitor to the smoking-room.

"Not looking quite the thing, my dear fellow," observed Sir Reginald, after a prolonged observation of his heir through the bottom of a tumbler. "Nervy, and a bit too thin in the barrel for perfect health. What's that you say? Worried and beastly miserable! Why? You've a nice place, nice neighbours, nice—ahem! children, nice—ha, ahem! little wife. Ought to be happy. Ought to be happy!"

Upon which Richard poured forth his budget of grievances. Just as Ellice, sounded tactfully by her mother, undid the string of her pack. Each of the young people told a tale of identical suffering. Both were misunderstood; in one case, as in the other, either was bound by the ties of wedlock to an uncongenial soul, an unsympathetic nature. The husband denounced his marriage as a failure. The wife, in terms of nearly equal strength, declared their union a "miserable mistake."

"Good lor'! good lor'!" said Sir Reginald.

"Dear me! dear me!" sighed Mrs. Noriette.

"And I humour her," said Richard, striding up and down a worn place in the smoking-room carpet, "in every possible way."

"I defer to him, consult him, do everything," said Ellice, "that it is a wife's duty to do. But—"

She began to sob just as Richard began to swear, proving that there were no further available assets in the Bank of Expression.

At dinner, being materially refreshed by the outpouring and stimulated by the presence of sympathetic witnesses husband and wife availed themselves of the opportunity of being much more actively belligerent than they would have been in connubial *tête-à-tête*. Veiled personalities bounced from the head of the social board, to be volleyed back again from the other end. The servants glided as upon thin ice, the guests sat upon the thorns of apprehension. There is nothing quite so exhausting as acting the part of human buffer between two persons both able and willing to collide.

"Six of one and half a dozen of the other!" said Sir Reginald loudly, towards the termination of the banquet, when asked whether he would take Benedictine or Chartreuse with his coffee. Nobody quite guessed what he meant except Mrs. Noriette, his *vis-à-vis* at table, and she heaved a sigh of unaffected relief when Ellice rose.

"I think, dear, I will go and look at the babies," the grandmother said, gathering her ancient laces about shoulders yet smooth and white.

"They won't be asleep," said their mother.

"They would be," remarked the male author of their being, "if they were decently managed!"

"Some temperaments revolt under decent management," retorted the mother of the babes under discussion. "Heredity is responsible," she added, "for much."

"Good lor'!" groaned Sir Reginald, fumbling in his waistcoat pocket for a digestive tabloid of pepsine, as the hostess swept like a blizzard from the room.

"Why can't they pull together?" thought Mrs. Noriette, climbing the wide staircase. "What is at the bottom of

it all ? According to Ellice, she is a perfect wife; on Dick's authority, he is an admirable husband. Dear me!" she exclaimed, entering the night nursery, "what are you children doing out of bed ?"

"We's playin', gwandma!" shouted Hammy, the tails of his brief and single garment agitated by the breeze of his going, as he strode frantically up and down the strip of red carpet, bordered with an extraordinary pattern of little pigs going to market, that lay between his bed and Berta's. "Mary's gone down to get ve clean nighties from ve hot-linen pwess, an' we's playin', gwandma!"

"Playin'," echoed Berta, peeping out from the folds of a nursery towel.

"Playin' dad and mummy havin' a wow. Keep on cwyin', Berta," ordered Hammy. Then, as Berta uttered a succession of gurgling noises intended for hysterical sobs, the young realist exclaimed, plunging his hands into non-existent pockets; "Tears again ! Why I mawwid, damfiknow."

"Hammy!" exclaimed his grandmother in an awful voice.

"Dad says it. What do I do now, Berta ?"

"Do' know," chuckled Berta, rosy with glee and recent soaping.

"I do, though. . . . Bang ve door an' twamp down the hall, sayin' baddy swear-words all ve time!"

"Hammy!" cried his scandalised grandmother.

"Den I sing!" shrieked Berta.

"You sings—and play ve pyanna. . . . O ! an' slam it shut an' go to the writing-table—an' crible on a telladraf form—no ! in a wed-covered book what locks. Where's Mary's Prayer-Book—the one wif the bwass clasp ? Now, breeve up an' down an' froo your nose while you're doin' it, you little silly. Watch, gwandma!"

Gwandma, who had collapsed in a low basket-chair watched with horrified interest.

"Now the photodraf," commanded Hammy, "what you wear inside your fwock?"

"Man-man's," gurgled Berta.

"Ve man's photodraf in ve glass case—wif spiky mustarshers an' a dwagoon's helmet like what I'm goin' to 'ave when I gwow up." Hammy went on, "Pull it out an'—no, you don't lick it, you kiss it. Like so. Look at me, gwandma."

And the infant histrion gave a really creditable rendering of the emotional demonstrations described.

"Can it be?" murmured Mrs. Noriette, fascinated yet agast. "She has vowed, hundreds of times, that affair never meant anything. Silly sentimentality, nothing more. Oh! what is the child doing now?"

"Now's the telladraf," pursued Hammy, in high excitement. "You don't send William with it or Rose. You dwess in a huwwy, and send the childwen to get their things on, and send a message to tell Miss Purdy your head aches, and you'll take Hammy and Berta as far as the village for a wun. And you send the telladram to the Dard's Tub —

"'Guard's Club,'—oh!" murmured the audience.

"An' it's only one word—'Yes!' An' you're angry with the girl what works the tick-a-tick cause she's s'pwised there isn't no more. What're you wubbin' your eyes for? Mummy didn't ewy till after——"

"I sleepy!" whined Berta, and took refuge in her grandmother's lap.

"Then you be the man with the spiky mustarsh, an' gwandma'll be the chuf-chuff naughty car he was dwiving when we met him on the woad the day after. Stop ve chuf-chuff. Now jump out an' say, 'At last!' an' kiss

mummy's hands. I'll be mummy, an' cwy, 'Vis is so wong, but I am bwoken-hearted,' an' ve spiky-mustarch chuf-chuff man—'"

But gwandma interrupted the dual representation in a voice that chilled the generous current of the principal performer's blood. "Hammy," she asked, in awful tones, unlike any previously heard from her, "have you ever been whipped—hard?"

"Yes!" said Hammy, with a disarming smile.

"Then, if you do not want to be whipped even harder than that—never speak again about the man with the spiky moustache who drove down on the automobile. Understand, you are never again to play at being him—or your mother!"

"Or mummy!" Hammy's face fell in contemplation of his dwindled repertoire. Then it brightened. "But I can play at being dad!" he said hopefully. "It's such a much better fun than ve ovver. Can't I?"

"Yes—you can play at being dad!" agreed Mrs Noriette, as Mary came in with an armful of infantile night-wear, and she went away with her discovery. Ellice, as a girl, had always been silly and sentimental, Ellice's mother owned. Silliness and sentimentality are not usually taken off with the maiden name, and left behind in the wardrobe with the spinster garments abandoned in favour of the robes and confections comprising the trousseau. And—Dick had grounds for grumbling, evidently.

The next day was wet. Hammy and Berta, possibly as a result of the airy gambols of the foregoing night, had developed slight symptoms of catarrh, manifested in frequent sneezes and constant demands for the loan of adult pocket-handkerchiefs, coldly ignored by the owners of these articles. Richard, rendered amphibious by a complete suit of waterproof, drove away in the dog-cart with

the land-steward. Ellice and Mrs. Noriette were hermetically sealed up in the morning-room, Sir Reginald settled down in the library with *The Times* and *Country Life*. A portrait-group of his daughter-in-law with her children ornamented the front page of the latter periodical.

"They're nice little beggars, and she's a pretty woman," said the baronet reflectively. "Why can't she put up with Dick? Why can't Dick be content with her? As a boy he struck me as being a good deal of an ass; he is certainly improved, but retains enough of the original resemblance to make an adoring husband."

"Gwandpa," asked a small voice, "what is a doring husband?" And Sir Reginald, parrying his grandson's question after the time-honoured method, demanded:

"Who said you and Berta might come in here?"

"Nobody," said Hammy, wrinkling his small snub nose preparatory to a sneeze. "But all the chairs and fings in the day nursery is standin' on their heads, and Mary said it was turn-out day. And we mayn't play in the wain outdoors or do anyfing sensible—an' we've come to you. An' what is a doring husband? Is dad a doring husband?"

Sir Reginald patted the sleek bullet head of his son's heir, and carefully lifted the blue ribbon bow which obscured Berta's left eye. Thank Heaven, these ridiculous ornaments have gone out of date, but a comparatively short time ago every feminine infant was thus absurdly cockaded. Covering some slight embarrassment, natural in an old gentleman with a fierce white moustache and much experience of the world, with this paternal action, he replied:

"I hope so, my boy!"

"Was you a doring husband? Shall I be a doring husband when I gwow up?" demanded Hammy. "And would I grow up more quick if I wored a long piece of black hair

wound my wist under my silk underwest sleeve like dad does? Only I wears wool ones—and my sleeves is short. Price, the gwoom, wears a stwap—and when I asked him what for, he said to stwngthen his gwip; but hair must be better—because dad wears it. If yeller would do, I could cut one of Berta's curls off, or if bwown was any good, mummy might give me a piece of hers! But black must be the most stwngthenin' kind—and that's why dad—”

“Good lor’!” said Sir Reginald, breaking out into a gentle perspiration. “My boy, you must never tell of things like that. You weren’t meant to see them—or if they’re shown you, it’s under the seal of confidence. You know what the seal of confidence is, don’t you?”

“Course!” said Hammy. “It’s a big violet seal with ‘V. A.’ on it, and the small sweet omviblokes that have got it on are diwected in wiolet ink, Wichard Lechesne, Esq. Sometimes the postman bwings ‘em. But other times a gwoom wides over mornin’s; he doesn’t wide up to the house, but stops at the twirly gate in the plantation fence; where me and Berta’s hidin’ from Miss Purdy and ve silly old lessons. An’ dad gives him a sovwin—an’ he touches his hat—why doesn’t our gwooms wear gween livewy an’ cockades?—an’ when he’s wided away dad sniffs at ve letter an’ kisses it—an’ puts it away wif ve uvvers in his note-case. And his note-case *is* gettin’ fat. I can see ve fatness of it froo his coat. . . . Why are you sayin’ swears, gwandpa?”

“So that is what has been goin on! The worm at the root of things, confound it! A revival of that old affair I’d good reason to believe—everybody had good reason to believe—dead and buried years ago. And an old married woman—ten years older than his own. What a fool the boy is!”

"Gwandpa," urged Hammy, "I want to 'fneeze."

"Sneeze, then," his grandparent said curtly. "Ought I to have stopped the child before he blurted this out?" he continued, resuming his mental wrestlings. "Questioning children is as bad as pumping servants; but there wasn't a single—no, that I'm ready to swear. And Violet Ambersham—a man-eater, by Jove! And I'm infernally sorry for Ellice. As for Ambersham—let him look to his own interests—if he has his eyes open.—What are those children up to now?"

Hammy and Berta, seated on opposite footstools, were discussing the merits of a hideously-battered sailor doll, which Berta, holding by one hand upright between them, regarded with a tender air. Hammy, leaning gallantly forwards, his eyes ardently fixed on Berta's face, alternately filled the part of prompter, and supported the *rôle* of leading man in what proved to be a scene of comedy. "Ve doll's Hammy, my little boy—I've bwought to see you—say he's ezactly like me—ve tall lady always does—"

"Like oo!" giggled Berta.

"Like dad, you little idiot! And ven you kiss me, quite hard—just here—an' dad kisses you in ve same place." Hammy indicated a spot in the centre of his chubby cheek with a fat forefinger adorned with a mourning-edged nail.

"Intolerable! Sickly! Very bad form," burst out Sir Reginald, hurling *Country Life* to the other end of the apartment, and trampling on *The Times*. "No, don't howl, Hammy," he hastened to say, as Hammy began, as a preparation for the shedding of tears, to turn down an extraordinary expanse of lower lip. "Don't whimper, Berta, I'm not angry with either of you . . . But you must promise grandpapa, both of you, in honest earnest, never, never to play at being your father again."

"Or," snuffed Hammy, "or ve big lady ?"

"Or Lady Ambersham."

"Vat is her weally name," cried Hammy, "though I never could wemember it."

But, pressed by his grandparent, he gave the necessary promise, reserving to himself the right of playing at being gwandpa as often as he chose. Then he retired with Berta; and Richard, returning home after an absence somewhat unduly prolonged, found Nemesis waiting in the library.

"I shall not stop to deny your charges, sir," he asserted, standing very stiffly on the hearthrug, "though things are not as—as serious as you seem to think. But I should like to know how you found out. . . . My—Ellice suspected, I suppose, and—and verified her suspicions somehow, and—"

"I don't believe she does suspect, though I can't for the life of me comprehend why she doesn't," affirmed Sir Reginald. "She has complained—of every straw in the bundle but the last one." He tugged at the white moustache. "If she knew that you were carryin' on a clandestine correspondence with the Ambersham woman through grooms, and waiting-maids, for all I know," Richard winced, "and carried her letters about you, and wore a lock of her hair up your sleeve—— You do; you can't deny it."

"I demand," said Richard, very white, "the name of your informant."

"It'll hit you hard when you know.... Your boy, sir—your own innocent six-year-old Hammy—blurted it all out. Sat there on that hassock and played it through—the whole sickly French comedy, sir, in a game with his sister Berta. I was the audience. D'ye take me? I was the audience, and an uncommonly bad quarter of an hour they gave me."

Richard, with a deteriorated complexion, pulled out the note-case, and with uncertain fingers undid the link of his left cuff. There was a fire upon the hearth in compliment to the damp weather, and into the red core of it went the plump note-case, and a long, glossy lock of raven hair, tied with violet silk twist.

Queer coincidences abound in life. At that very moment Ellice, stifling the recurrent hiccup of grief with a little tear-soaked wad of cambric, was extracting from the secret drawer of her writing-table a private diary—the red book with the brass lock of which we have heard, and tearing from this, with many sighs, several much-underlined pages, and extracting from a miniature case the portrait of the gentleman with the “spiky mustarsh,” she also confided these dear but perilous pieces of evidence to the accommodating flames.

“I have been weak,” she said, “but not wicked, and Captain Throgmortonleigh is the soul of honour—at least, I believe so. But I promise, I promise never to answer his letters or to see him again! And how the children—little things like that—could have been so dreadfully observant, I cannot imagine.” Her eyes opened wide with alarm. She gasped. “Oh, if they should take it into their heads to play that dreadful game before Richard. Perhaps they have. Perhaps at this moment he——”

“I have forbidden it. I don’t believe they will,” said Mrs. Noriette consolingly, “or that they have done so. Richard’s manner does not convey the idea.”

But thenceforth Ellice regarded her babes with the palpitant and apprehensive interest one might bestow upon two small but highly primed infernal machines, innocent in appearance, but likely to go off at any moment. From their father, too, Hammy and Berta received a good deal of respectful attention. What need remains of inventing

make-believe play-games about grown-ups when grown-ups are willing to join in real ones? Enthralled by this readiness on the part of their elders, Hammy and Berta but rarely reverted to the more imaginative form of pastime previously described. Only upon the afternoon succeeding the departure of Sir Reginald and Mrs. Noriette, "Let's play at being uvver people," Hammy was heard to say.

Richard, reading a sporting novel by one of Ellice's favourite feminine authors, closed the volume. Ellice, embroidering in a corner of her favourite sofa, sat up suddenly.

"Yeth. Let's be gwandpa and gwandma!" agreed Berta.

"In the conserbatory," said Hammy readily, "when we were playin' Esquimaux in the gwavel under the tweefern stand. I'll be gwandpa." He took Berta's finger-tips with an air of old-fashioned gallantry, and, bending his body stiffly from the hips, imprinted a warm but respectful kiss upon the pudgy hand. "Now you laugh, and get wed in the face—a little—and say—"

Ellice became aware that Richard was listening with strained attention. Richard could not fail to mark the absorbed interest of his wife. Both waited, with bated breath, the moment for stopping the game.

"Say," dictated Hammy, "'If this is my weward, Sir Weginald, for pwomotin' the growth of the olive-bwanch, I have not deserved it!' Then gwandpa says, 'The palm'—there's palms in the conserbatory—'the palm of honour shall be shared between us. My boy has been an idiot, an' your girl a fool'—I wonder who that boy and girl is!—'but, thanks to the pwecocity of the wising genewation, the line has been dwawn at mere idiocy an' folly.'"

"It is the truth, upon my soul!" said Richard, throwing away the sporting novel and coming over to the sofa.

"Oh, Dick dearest, I swear it is!" gasped Ellice, dropping the embroidery. Each believed that the other, instead of seeking, was conferring pardon.

Richard remains ignorant of the red book and the cherished photograph; Ellice has never heard of the violet-ink letters or of the lock of hair, to this day. On all sides I hear them quoted as an ideally affectionate couple.

THE YOUNG MAN FROM "THE SHOP"

His Indian outfit was as new and as obvious as his prickly heat, and in the soles of his oldest boots were yet embedded fragments of the gritty gravel of the drill-ground and the gun-yard, just as his heart still retained the memory of parting kisses, salted with tears, given him by a girl at home, down in Berkshire, between whom and this young man certain vows had been exchanged. She, the girl, thought nobody like him. He was a newly-fledged subaltern of the R.F.A., with the 160th Battery at Meerbulpur, a civil and military station, now included in the North-West Provinces. Meerbulpur has a Government stud, a race-course, an historic fort, and extensive cantonments.

Drill on foot and with the battery horsed, guards, fatigues, parades and reviews, severe instructions in duties in camp and on the line of march, entrainings and detrainings, searchlight and target-practice under totally new conditions of space, environment, and atmosphere swallowed up the young man from "The Shop," whose name was J. J. Willcocks-Cornellis. Everything was new, from the very dust on his field-service kit to the guttural inflections of the Hindi and Behari tongues with which he wrestled, and—wrestling—overcame. The now faded and spotty photograph of the girl at home in Berkshire dropped from its heat-cracked frame behind a pile of dictionaries, vocabularies, and grammars in the subaltern's quarters one red-hot April day. Her memory had dropped out of the heart of J. J. Willcocks-Cornellis in exactly the same way after he met "The Octopus" at the Meerbulpur Light

Horse Camp Sports. Remember, pray, that he was very young, the fluffiest of the fluffy. She—"The Octopus"—was the grass-widowed wife of one Grier-Fenningsby, a Lieutenant of the East India Squadron. He, scarcely ever seen, was known to the Three Services as represented in the United Provinces by the nickname of "The Little More," because a little less of him would have meant that Mrs. Grier-Fenningsby would have had no husband at all. She lived with a sister—a drab-haired, bread-coloured duplicate of herself, married to a wealthy Puisne Judge of the High Court of Judicature—a mild, sleepy, sheep-eyed old gentleman in society; upon the Bench a withering satirist and relentless summer-up.

"The Octopus" wrote notes. Quite a shower of them, attar-perfumed, written in violet ink on pale-green paper with a monogram of twisted silver tentacles up in the left-hand corner, fell round the young man from "The Shop." As the days went by, the square outline of the package in the left-side pocket of his waistcoat, or of his tennis or polo-shirt when he did not wear a waistcoat, grew more and more distinct. There was not much in the notes; they were appointments for early-morning rides outside cantonments, visits to the rose-gardens of the district, peeps at the interiors of temples and the outsides of wonderful old native houses squeezed into narrow streets, an excursion to the palace and pleasure-grounds of a local Nawab; but these parties were nearly always parties of two. When they were otherwise the third would be Mrs. Grier-Fenningsby's little girl—pale-faced, brown-eyed, long-legged "Maudie"—who was always going home to relatives at Buxton next steamer from Bombay, and never went; or Mrs. Grier-Fenningsby's uncomplaining slave, Thorpenhaigh, a small, pale man, with a large knobby forehead that looked as if the figures and statistics stored behind it were

bursting out. Thorpenhaigh held a Secretaryship in the Revenue Department, was adored by "Maudie," and was supposed to worship her mother, who alternately bullied and patronised the pasty little man; and if bullying did not make him happy, why did he hug his chains?

He was a timid, nervous little man, Thorpenhaigh, who would turn blue in streaks if his riding-pony-hack pecked or stumbled, or a strange dog growled at him and showed its teeth. And when J. J. Wilcocks-Cornellis caught a reflection of his friend's patronising tone, or even the bullying one, in addressing Thorpenhaigh, he did not openly resent it.

The Judge of the High Court lived in a beautiful old house that had been built for a Chief Commissioner of the E.I.C. a hundred years before. It stood in gardens on the road that skirted the Racecourse, a mile beyond the town. There was a wilderness of roses in the gardens, and in the wilderness a marble pavilion that had once been a tomb. The young man from "The Shop" deemed the pavilion a place of enchantment, as had many other young men; for its cool, wide, punkah-swept, marble space contained a piano and comfortable divans and sofas, all the latest London magazines and illustrated papers, cigarettes ("The Octopus" was a confirmed votary of the Turkish weed), and cooling drinks, and the lady herself at certain hours known to the initiated. Thus, when the Judge, nerving himself to a sense of his responsibility to the distant Lieutenant, cross-questioned his wife as to Minna's young men, it was possible for Minna's sister to reply with absolute candour, "They never set foot in the house, dear!" Otherwise who knew what sort of things in letters might have gone forth, to the disturbing of the mind of Grier-Fenningsby with the East India Squadron. It is peculiarly illustrative of the infectiousness of contempt that Thorpenhaigh had the run

of the house and his place at the Judge's dinner-table unchallenged.

The Departmental Secretary was lying back in a long rattan chair in the pavilion one hot mid-April afternoon. Thorpenhaigh was looking even more dull-eyed, leaden-skinned, and bulgy-browed than usual. The white drill clothing he wore was well-cut and immaculate, his linen, his tie, and his brown boots were beyond reproach, yet on Thorpenhaigh they looked shabby. Mrs. Grier-Fenningsby noted this for the thousandth time, as she bit off a piece of pistachio-kernel for a screaming green parraquet. She was looking her best undeniably. Heat increased the transparency of her fair skin, lent new brightness to her pale green eyes, and did not take the natural wave and lustre out of her really remarkable squirrel-coloured hair. She wore a Delhi muslin gown, and for once was free from bangles. She languidly admired her arm, stretched upwards to the cage, which hung by a red-silk covered chain from a ring in the fretted dome above, and certainly the shapeliness of the limb revealed by the transparent material of her sleeve was undeniable.

"Here, Chota, take it!" she called to the parraquet, telling herself, as Chota bridled and sidled towards the delicacy, that, though ill-natured gossips might talk, no man of intelligence would believe Minna Grier-Fenningsby to be more than thirty-three at the outside.

"You do not look it, certainly," said Thorpenhaigh, in his tired little level voice, reading her thought, and replying to it in the way that had always surprised her.

"You agree with me?" Mrs. Grier-Fenningsby laughed, showing her teeth, which, though sound, were too large, and not sufficiently white to be called pearls, even by the most enamoured of her swains. "You guessed what I was thinking of. And you would give me a few years

more, wouldn't you, Eddris, to amuse myself in, before the inevitable end ?"

"Just a little longer tether," said Thorpenhaigh, "and then——!"

In his tired, lead-coloured face an undeniably false, and an undeniably costly, set of teeth were revealed by his sudden wide, straight-lipped grin. He lifted his vein-ridged hand from the chair-arm and jerked it as though it held the rope. "And then, dear lady, you must settle deferred accounts with Time." He added, after an instant's pause, "And with Life—and with Death—and Me."

Mrs. Grier-Fenningsby was not fortunate in her laugh. It was a jangle of unlovely sound, which malevolent persons likened to the merriment of the hyena.

"You put yourself last, with characteristic modesty."

"We are told on excellent authority," said Thorpenhaigh, yawning behind one of his veinous, clay-coloured hands, "that the last shall be first in the end. When does Maudie go home ?"

"I thought," said "The Octopus," winding her tentacles in and out of her squirrel-coloured hair, "that you couldn't bear to part with her."

"Putting my sentiments entirely on one side—a course upon which there is no need to urge you, since you always do," said the Secretary, "the child is eight years old, and unless her dying can benefit you in any way——"

"Eddris, don't be brutal !" exclaimed Mrs. Grier-Fenningsby, frowning.

"It is natural," returned the Secretary, showing his teeth, which were so palpably purchased, "that you should think the expression brutal, and natural that I should express myself unscrupulously, or behave so, where your benefit is concerned."

"I believe," said "The Octopus," making great play

—with her large, light green eyes, "I believe, Eddris, that you have me on the brain, poor dear! Don't you ever think, sleeping or waking, of any other woman ?"

The Secretary's thin hatchet profile was turned to her. If she could have seen the fierce red light that burned, for one revealing instant, under his heavy sallow eyelids, she might have read it as a danger-signal, perhaps in time."

"I think of Maudie, do I not ?" he said, in a dry whisper.

"Maudie is a child," said "The Octopus," playing with a fan, of peacock's feathers.

"And I think of Gertrude," said Thorpenhaigh. He sat up, resting his elbows on the chair-arms, and stared over his folded hands into the garden, where, on each side of three wide alleys, ending at a marble reservoir, myriads of roses dropped their heads under the fierce kisses of the Indian sun, and sweet limes, mandarins and blood-oranges made perfumed thickets of blossom and fruit for refuge and shade. "Sometimes I see her—in dreams, I suppose, though I always seem to myself to be sleepless when she comes. And—"

"My dear man," screamed Mrs. Grier-Fenningsby, "you don't mean to say you haven't forgotten that—" she hesitated for a word, and added, "that—mouldy old affair ?"

"We killed Gertrude, you and I," said the Secretary, keeping his haggard profile towards his companion. "She died of those letters that were written home about my—friendship with you. Nine years ago to-day." He wiped his bulgy forehead with a gaudy handkerchief. "Have you no conscience ? Don't you ever regret—what we brought about between us ?" There was froth upon his under lip, and as he wrung his lean hands together the bones cracked in an ugly way.

"Good gracious ! what had it to do with me ?" screamed

Mrs. Grier-Fenningsby, now thoroughly roused and sitting up.

"If you had loved me," said the Secretary, "you would have been less to blame. But even while you beckoned and lured and enslaved me, you mocked and despised me. There were other men better worth netting; why not have let me go free? Don't answer, because I know! You saw in me the sand that soaked up your shadow without leaving any outward stain, the clay to take the impress of your will, the water to be poured out by you upon the ground and wasted, or kept in a vessel for use, the fuel for your burning, the beast for your burdens, the slave to drudge for you and bear your lash in silence through bitter years to come." He had turned his livid face upon the woman now, but that menacing flame had died down and his dull eyes were only weary. "And you took me away from her so easily. . . . I was thirty-two. I hadn't even the excuse that others have had—that the young fool has who worships your footprints to-day. I mean Willcocks-Cornellis, the boy from Woolwich."

"Really!" exclaimed "The Octopus," scornfully. "My dear Eddris, you can't be jealous at this time of day!"

"I am not jealous," said the Secretary, moistening his dry lips; "but I am sorry for the boy. He is—a fool in the way that I was."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Grier-Fenningsby, not ill-pleased.

"And he is the more like me in this, that there's a girl at home in Berkshire to whom he is engaged. I have seen her photograph at his quarters," said the Secretary, writhing in his chair. "She is like—extraordinarily like—" His suffering face said whom.

"Then she is not a beauty, I certainly," mocked Mrs. Grier-Fenningsby.

Thorpenhaigh went on in the whispering voice that told

of pain as though it had been a scream: "I ask you, for the sake of that likeness, at which he has never looked since you bedevilled him—for it has gone from its place upon the wall—to spare—your latest victim!"

"The Octopus" broke into a triumphant peal of her ugly, jangling laughter.

"I ask you, and you laugh at me now, as you laughed then," said the Secretary. "My God! have you no pity? Have you forgotten how you made me show you Gertrude's letters and her portrait—how you laughed over the letters . . . how you jeered at the portrait? And I hid from you the anguish that it gave me to hear you, and joined with you in making light of her. Then those letters—those letters that broke the true heart that loved me—were written home, and I have always believed—always suspected, though I have hidden my suspicion from you, being the coward I am—that they were written by you! Answer me! Were they not?"

"The Octopus" sat up. She looked her best, and knew it, when she was angry. Her light green eyes darkened to peridot, and her red lips curved in a mocking smile.

"Answer one question of mine, first!" said she, leaning nearer, "and then I will tell you the truth—about those letters." A loosened rope of her squirrel-coloured hair dropped suddenly over her shoulder, her breath was on the Secretary's discoloured cheek, and her shining eyes looked straight into his haunted ones.

"Go on," said her slave, in the rattling whisper.

"Could you ever, once having been taken away from her by me, as you gracefully put it, have gone back to Gertrude, Eddris?" The rope of hair fell across his coat-sleeve, and he knew the trick of old, and yet it made his heart beat chokingly.

"No," he said, or rather whispered. "God forgive me—no!"

"Then I will tell you," said Minna Grier-Fenningsby. "I did not write those letters home myself, but I got Amy to. She knew your Gertrude's cousin—had been at the same boarding-school with her years before at Eastbourne." She gave the jangling laugh again. "Oh, it was easy enough! And you got your *paquet* of dismissal by the next mail."

"No. She wrote to ask me if the thing she had heard of me was true, and simply begged me, if it was, and my love had gone from her to another—she did not even put it grammatically, did she?—to send back her letters and portrait and a locket I used to wear with her hair."

"Common, ordinary, not particularly fine brown hair. I remember it; and the locket—a clumsy thing with an anchor in bad little turquoises," sneered Mrs. Grier-Fenningsby. "As for the portrait, it was that of a very commonplace young woman, to be frank!"

"I did as she asked, and in six months I read the announcement of her death in the newspapers," the Secretary said, and wiped his forehead again with the gaudy handkerchief that quarrelled with his tie. "And it comes to this, that through you I killed her—that woman who would come back from Heaven even now, if by doing so she could save me from Hell—if there be any place of torment worse than this. . . ."

"You killed her! I killed her! We killed her!" mocked the woman on the divan. "Yet, if I remember correctly, your Gertrude died of diphtheria. Are you going to say that your heartless desertion gave her *that*?"

"No . . . I am going to say something else," said the Secretary, still in that ugly whisper. "Maudie goes home next week. I have put the matter very plainly before

Sir Burbage Elstree"—he referred to the owner of the pavilion and Mrs. Grier-Fenningsby's brother-in-law—"and—Maudie goes!"

Mrs. Grier-Fenningsby did not reply, because she was too much astonished at this act of rebellion upon the Secretary's part to speak. The dignified native butler, his own menial following with the silver kettle, came in with the tea-tray, and the Secretary rose, and made tea with the deftness of a woman, and brought her a cup, with the proper complement of goat's-milk cream, and sugar, and the macaroon cakes she loved. Then he filled a saucer with cream, and carried it out of the cool shade of the pavilion into the garden.

"He sets it in among the shaddocks, look, Hassan-ji," said Dada, the butler's man. "Day by day, and ever a little nearer to the pavilion where the mem is. Why, dost thou——"

"*Chuprao*, fool! what is it to thee or me?" snorted Hassan. But he looked oddly across to the dropping branches, whose red-green globes weighed them to the ground. Perhaps something stirred in among the thick, shining leaves. . . .

We are not by any means forgetting J. J. Willcocks-Cornellis, who had a healthy conscience, and suffered from it a good deal in the hot watches of the punkah-haunted nights. He no longer loved the girl at home in Berkshire, and felt it to be his duty as a man to tell her so. With the tentacles of "The Octopus" firmly fixed in his heart, brain, and soul, he fought the bad fight between Duty and Desire, and Duty had already gone to the wall when the end came.

He stammered out the story of his infatuation—he called it his "hopeless passion"—one night in a palmy alcove at a Government House ball. He told her, for the twen-

tieth time, about the girl in Berkshire whom he had thought he loved, but whom, alas ! he loved no longer ! He shed hot tears, and was exceedingly incoherent; and as "The Octopus" stroked his soft hair back from his hot forehead and both calmed and maddened him with her touch, she had an impulse to pity and to spare. But the impulse passed, because she knew this boy to be of the malleable human material that moulds into a slave, and something in the Secretary's face that day in the pavilion had warned her that his bonds were wearing thin.

She spoke of him now, and his "great, pure, disinterested devotion." He had taken Maudie across country to meet the mail steamer at Bombay, and had not yet returned. He was expected on the following day—good, humdrum, unromantic Eddris, so chivalrous *really*!—and so soft-hearted about children and animals. Why, the last thing he did before he went away was to bribe one of the servants to set a saucer of milk nightly in the pavilion for a stray kitten—some wretched, half-starved thing that lived in the garden and picked up scraps of food about the house.

J. J. Willcocks-Cornellis grew tired of hearing the praises of the absent Secretary. But his incipient sulkiness was quite utterly dispelled by the enchantress's consenting to let him drive her, swathed in warm fleecy mantle and silk veilings, home to the villa near the Racecourse. It was a glorious blue, starlit night, and his smart bamboo cart bowled at the heels of a speedy cob over the three miles of wide, tree-shadowed road that lay between Government House and the garden villa of his Honour the Judge, and quiet and still, with night-lamps palely twinkling behind the grass blinds. Under the starlit skies one may guess how fair the garden seemed to the young man from "The Shop," and what odours of Paradise breathed from the

dew-drenched roses that walled the alleys and climbed over the marble pavilion to the very dome.

"Oh! how ripping!" gasped J. J. Wilcocks-Cornellis, thrilling in every nerve with the consciousness of the touch of the one woman upon earth upon his arm. "Don't send me away, darling, just for another blessed minute. If you could see your own face by the light of these stars you'd understand how hard it is for me to say good-night. No, it isn't damp here; but if you think so, come into the pavilion for one minute. Do, please!"

"You silly boy!" sighed "The Octopus," and tapped his lips rebukingly. Her chastening fingers were seized and kissed. Over the boy's bent head the woman looked into the pavilion—dusk except for the patches of starshine that streamed through the piercings of the dome. There was a speck of white in the middle of the great Bokhara carpet that was the saucer placed for the stray kitten at the absent Secretary's request, and from the saucer a long black rope-like shadow stretched away into the other shadows. Perhaps it was cast by the thick cotton rope of the still punkah, perhaps . . .

Perhaps—and then the blood rushed suffocatingly back to her heart, and her ringed fingers turned dank and cold in the warm young clasp that held them. And J. J. Wilcocks-Cornellis looked up and started too. For on the threshold of the pavilion a white woman stood, and waved the approaching couple back with an upward, outward movement of both hands. She seemed of medium height and plainly dressed. Even to the inexperienced eyes of the young man from "The Shop" her garments had an old-fashioned look. But a ray of brightness from the pierced dome fell upon her face, revealing its rather homely pleasantness plainly, and—

"Mary!" gasped J. J. Wilcocks-Cornellis, with a

creeping sensation at the roots of his hair. For the face of the woman who waved them back was the face of the girl at home in Berkshire. Or so it seemed to him, if not to Mrs. Grier-Fenningsby.

"Why—why do you call her Mary?" "The Octopus" leaned on him, shaking, scarcely able to move, and yet dragging him away. "Take me back to the house and go—go! Why did you call her Mary? Her name was Gertrude . . . and he said she would come back from Heaven, if need be, to save him from Hell! But why does she come to me? . . . Oh, look! The snake—the snake!"

Her words trailed away into mere nonsense. She was idiotic with terror and fright. She could only point to the second unexpected guest the pavilion had entertained that night. Gliding back to its lair among the shaddocks, it raised itself on the threshold of the pavilion, and, poised with full-spread hood six feet above the coil on which it rested, looked out into the garden with glittering, deadly eyes, perhaps seeing the intended victim or both of them, hurrying, spirit-warned, from the vicinity of the death that slays in darkness. And then it sank down and glided away into the night.

* * * * *

The Meerbulpur *Weekly Courier* of the following Saturday contained three paragraphs of local interest:

"Mrs. W. Grier-Fenningsby, one of the most charming and popular ladies of Meerbulpur society, is confined to her apartments by illness, the result of nervous shock sustained by encountering a cobra in the garden of her residence on Wednesday night."

"A cobra of the giant Hamadryad species was shot on Thursday morning in the garden of the villa of the Hon.

Sir Burbage Elstree, Kt., in time to avert a fatality for some member of the Hon. and learned Judge's household."

"We regret to record the sudden death of Eddris Thorpenhaigh, Esq., Chief Secretary to the Board of Revenue. The deceased gentleman was returning from a journey to Bombay, undertaken in order to place the little daughter of a friend in the care of an acquaintance travelling to England by the s.s. *Veshvara*, advertised to sail from Bombay on the 11th. As the door of the first-class compartment of the North-Western express in which Mr. Thorpenhaigh travelled was found open on the arrival of the train at —— Station at 12 p.m. on Wednesday night, a search party of coolies, commanded by an officer, was despatched up the line, with the result that the dead body of the unfortunate gentleman was discovered. Great regret is felt in military and civil circles" etc.

THE ROUT OF THE ROYAL MAC TURKS

WHEN the first Battalion of that dandy line regiment, the Royal Mac Turks, detrained at the Bulmerston Road Station, marched blaring through Shipsea, and took up its quarters at Shoredge Barracks—Shoredge being usually converted into “Sewerage” upon the lips of the rank and file—there was quite an unusual flutter in the Shipsea dovecotes. Unlike the outgoing regiment, whose colonel inculcated matrimony by repeated example, and whose juniorest subaltern was severely engaged to the daughter of a Nonconformist divine, the Mao Turks were bachelors, almost to a man, and confirmed bachelors, too! *The Book of the Wiles of Women*, so often quoted by Eastern writers, could have been searched from cover to cover in vain, one might have wagered, for a single snare sufficient to entrap the youngest and least experienced of the Royal Mac Turks. But, to the consternation of the seniors, he was snapped up ere his cheek had borne testimony to the ozony character of the Solent breezes for a fortnight. It happened at an Assembly Rooms Ball, given ostensibly in honour of the arrival of the Royal Mac Turks—at least, I think so. I know “The Bursting Bud” got him. She was a glowing brunette, with West Indian onyx in her rolling eyes and West Indian ivory in her smile, and a passion for decided colours in her dress, which was always short to indicate how recently she had come out. . . . Short dresses are worn at the moment, but concealment of the feet was common at the time of which I write. It was very easy to become engaged to “The Bursting Bud,” as the youngest

Mac Turk, whose name was Pott-Baysthorpe, found, but it was more difficult to get unhooked again.

"How the twelfth letter did it happen, my good fellow?" asked Pott-Baysthorpe's friend and mentor, Debadie, known in his set as "The Gentle Gazelle." Debadie had been cured of a bad habit of swearing by an American variety actress, who took, at one time, a great interest in his career, and tried to improve him when she had time. . . . She had gone farther West on the track of bigger game, leaving the embankments thrown up and the sleepers by the wayside, as it were, and the ruts of her wheels were grassing over; but Debadie swore less, or if he swore, swore in a different way. When the New Regulations came out, abolishing polo, restricting the movable furniture of officers' quarters to a table, Windsor chair, iron bedstead, tin washstand, deal chest of drawers, fender and zinc bath provided by Government, and throwing open the Army to the ambitious but impecunious Board School graduate, Debadie lapsed, and permanently.

You form his acquaintance at the moment when he burst into Pott-Baysthorpe's quarters on the morning after the ball at the Shipsea Assembly Rooms, and found Pott-Baysthorpe sitting in his bath—not the Government zinc affair, a nice private arrangement with a lid and lock and key, and the owner's name painted outside. And Pott-Baysthorpe was literally, and not conjecturally, covered with blushes, as he sat sobbing bitterly into his sponge, with an open letter and a photograph and a lock of hair, black and rather wiry, which had come inside the letter, lying on the Turkish towel mat beside him.

"I ca-an't tutta-tell!" spluttered the victim. "I don't know; upon my soul, I don't!"

"That be suspended for a full-blown denial of the actual fact!" said Debadie, lighting a cigarette.

"It's not a hanged bl-blooming lie," stuttered the sufferer. "It's the truth. I d-don't know. It was after the second extra. . . . I'd taken her to the supper-room to have some ices and things, and paid the waiter for a r-rotten bottle of bub-beastly Boy, and we went to sit out the rest of the valse in a d-dark cu-cu-corner."

"Those dark corners are condemned dangerous things. Well, you'd got your futile arm round the girl, and were babbling squashy nothings in her ears ?"

"N-nothings. They were no more. I told her I liked dark eyes and Andul—what-is-it?—insteps and white teeth, and never meant to marry unless my little wife——"

"Ah-h-h! Yah-h!" gnashed Debadie.

"Unless my little wife had 'em. And I was keepin' on like that when she kissed the words down my throat. I felt as if a tennis ball had smacked me on the mouth," wailed Pott-Baysthorpe. "And, 'Let us go to Mamma. Take me to Mamma!' she gushed, jumpin' up. Of course I had to take her. And we went back to the ball-room, where they were making up a set for the cotillion, and she went straight up to Mrs. Costello. I'd have slipped off at the double, but she grabbed me and held on. 'I've been sitting out two extras with Mr. Pott-Baysthorpe, mamma,' I heard her say, 'and he kissed me and asked me to be his little wife.' My mouth was open to say, 'I'll swear I didn't!' but the old lady got me round the neck—oh, crumbs!—and hugged me before the roomful. 'My boy,' she howls. 'My son!' I've never seen such a thing done before, off the stage. I never dreamed it could be done in real life. I never. Dash-dash-dash it all! What will my father say? What will the Colonel say? I shall be the butt of the regiment and the kick-ball of our county. Dash! dash! dash!"

And the broken-hearted Pott-Baysthorpe fairly howled.

- Debadie descended from his pedestal to comfort the afflicted with many expressions of ordinary sympathy, interlarded with extraordinary oaths. But he shook with laughter as he went down the flagged entrance passage of Officers' Block C. It may be mentioned that he was the next to fall. It was the "Consumptive Octopus" who hooked Debadie.

Her wan, transparent tentacles had closed ere now on many a gallant man. Her method was as original as infallible.

Debadie, strolling in defiant single blessedness upon the common or along the parade, would sometimes encounter the smartest of bath-chairs, nickel-plated and glazed to admiration, and adorned with a monogram of chaste design. Inside the bath-chair . . . What? A fluff of filmy muslins, topped with a broad-leaved white hat, with drooping plumes and a lace veil. Through the veil a dazzling hectic bloom caught your eye, a bewildering pair of long-lashed violet eyes looked mournfully, beseechingly at you, or disregarded you when their owner seemed more frail and fading than usual, when her Greek profile, transparent as alabaster, was turned aside towards the sea, and one little ungloved hand—ah! the pathos of the blue veins and too-delicate articulations—lay like a neglected sea-shell on the owner's lap. The bath-chair was usually attended by a matronly, blue-draped hospital nurse, and pushed by a discreet manservant out of livery. It turned up everywhere, that bath-chair—at reviews, naval demonstrations, civic displays, flower-shows. It glided with its diaphanous freight through all the open-air festivities of Shipsea. Debadie, like many a man before him, felt an interest in the lovely, fragile creature in the smart bath-chair. Her name, he learned, was St. Marion—Mrs. St. Marion—and before he had time to ask, his informant added:

"A widow. Quite . . . Oh yes, quite young, as you say. The husband, they say, was one of the St. Marions of County Ballyhooley. Sad story. Killed out hunting with the Drum-kettle Foxhounds, the day before the wedding—was to have taken place, I mean—taken to her father's house, Castle Kiernan. She was one of the Kiernans of Banbomagh, so they say! Was married to him by the house-chaplain, ten minutes before he died, crying with his latest breath, 'Go round by the Gommach's Gap, Kathleen—'"

"Ah haw! Is her—ah haw!—name Kathleen?" Debadie asked, swallowing a lump that rose in his throat.

"Kathleen's her name. 'Go round by the Gommach's Gap, Kathleen; there's the devil of a dirty take-off here!'"

"And then he—ah haw!"

"Died. With his hand in hers. Left her well off, they say, though, of course, I'm not responsible for what they say, you know," said Debadie's informant, a purple-nosed old General whose large family occupied a villa on the cheaper sea-front, while the author of their being lived at the Conservative Club. "Anyhow, you seem rather struck with Mrs. St. Marion."

"Sympathy—commiseration—sad sight—so evidently, —ah, haw!—doomed to die," said Debadie, rather incoherently.

The purple-nosed General chuckled over his morning brandy-peg.

"She has been doomed to die for a good many years, my dear sir, and it hasn't come off yet. Kitmutghar, a gluten biscuit, out of my special tin. Always eat when you drink, that's my motto." And the General, whose purple nose testified to his having eaten a good deal in the course of a lively life, chuckled again, delightedly muttering, as the disgusted Debadie rose and left him:

"Hook another, as she's hooked scores—as she hooked me, bless her!" Only he did not bless her. "Capital fun, see the sport—never move a piece of orange-peel that's brought one down; leave it for the next ass, that's my maxim!" Then the General engulfed his biscuit, finished his peg, took his curly hat and knobby bamboo, and sought a post of observation commanding an accustomed haunt of the lovely invalid. Through the medium of a pocket telescope the General saw the bath-chair advance in due course, with its fragile freight, Debadie following as a straw follows the amber that attracts. Mrs. St. Marion was quite unconscious of his gaze, and when a blossom of the sheaf of white roses she held in her lap escaped from its happy prison and fell to the ground, she started and flushed vividly as Debadie, with a bow that would have done credit to an actor of high comedy, picked it up and presented it to her. For an instant Mrs. St. Marion stared at him, her lovely cheeks growing white, her violet eyes dilated. Then, with a stifled cry, she fell back upon her cushions, and the valances of her wonderful black lashes shadowed cheeks that seemed deathly pale.

"Fainted because he's reminded her so of her lost Arthur—just as I did half a dozen years ago!" the inhuman old General chuckled. "Clever dodge, never fails to tell! Look at him fanning her with his hat! Now she's going to come to. Oh, bless her! bless her!" And the General, purple to the tips of his ears, stumped away, as Mrs. St. Marion was saying faintly:

"No, no! Tell the gentleman, nurse, that he did not frighten me. . . . It happens . . . that the likeness he bears . . . to someone once . . . very near and dear, struck me, more than usually to-day! I will go home now, Dawkins, to Holland Parade. I—" A fit of coughing seized and shook the fragile frame as a blast of wind shakes a slender

birch-sapling. One look of the violet eyes, so wistful in their hollow sadness, and the bath-chair moved on, leaving Debadie, his hat still poised above his head, his whole being in a tumult of poignant yet agreeable emotion. "*More than usual!*" She had noticed it before, the likeness she had spoken of. To her husband, of course, who had met his end in the hunting-field, and died calling for Kathleen with his latest breath. There were other men living who might have done, would do, the same.

And thus Debadie, Debadie the cynical, Debadie the unbelieving, Debadie the unimpressionable, the undupable, the wary, the wise, fell a prey to the Consumptive Octopus. Mrs. St. Marion learned to endure the sight of the bronzed Etruscan features of the man who was so terribly like her lost Arthur. She permitted him to call at Holland Parade; she did not disdain the offerings of game, of fruit, of oysters (warranted free from germs), and hothouse flowers, which the Captain laid upon her shrine. . . . She would lie on her favourite sofa, near the pink lamp-shade, or on her favourite lounge on the balcony, under the rose-tinted awning, and her violet eyes would gaze out over the sea, while Debadie held her spirit-thin hand. After he had got quite used to being called Arthur, Mrs. St. Marion's languid golden head would sometimes rest upon his stalwart shoulder, upholstered in the famous regimental tweed, a chaste mixture of the leading primary colours. Who, with a heart under his tweeds, could resist the temptation of being a prop to this perishing blossom? Tears would rise to Debadie's eyelids when Mrs. St. Marion pointed to the sunset, and said that the post-mortem Arthur was waiting there. Ere long he learned to be madly jealous of Arthur, and showed it, and was called a foolish boy! And then he told his love, and Kathleen's smile was like sad music as she reminded him that a woman who must shortly keep

an appointment on the other side of the sunset could hardly—might never— Then she wept, and owned that the long, silent harp-chords had begun to thrill once more. Then she coughed, and tried to hide a pink-stained hand-kerchief, and couldn't; and then she had a violent access of her mysterious complaint, and Debadie grew gaunt with watching outside a darkened chamber into which the obliging nurse, his sole hope, carried his letters day by day—letters which contained cheques for medical expenses and vows of unalterable devotion. When the letters grew sufficiently compromising Debadie was admitted to that darkened chamber, where his white lily, his Kathleen, lay fading away. And by-and-by Mr. Mauleverer, the Roman-nosed High Church vicar of St. Buda's, arrived, with his violet stole in his pocket, and Debadie and his Kathleen were married. Where the special licence came from Debadie never knew, but come it did. And Mrs. Debadie was wonderfully improved next day, "Had taken the turn," the nurse said; and Debadie tipped the devoted creature a ten-pound note, and thanked Heaven intermittently at intervals for a week. But he did not keep up that long, and Mrs. Debadie with her bath-chair—which, to the frenzy of her married victim, now bears his crest—Mrs. Debadie, her bath-chair, nurse, and man-servant still may be seen at various watering-places on the South Coast. The scandal that gathered and burst before the final rupture formed a pleasing pendant to the Costello and Pott-Baysthorne action for breach, in which Pott-Baysthorne would have come off badly had not some friendly demon prompted the defending counsel to ask "The Bursting Bud" in the course of cross-examination whether she had ever sued a gentleman for breach of promise before. The Bud owned to one previous writ, was proved to have issued four others, and Pott-Baysthorne emerged from the

fiery furnace, mulcted only in the sum of seven hundred pounds.

Not only in these two instances did the Royal Mac Turks suffer loss of prestige and spoil of reputation. One might quote the cases of Crichton, the Beauty of the regiment, and Miss Massingham; of Gerry Braybroke and the Hairy Caterpillar, who nibbled a hole in the green leaf of his young faith in human kind of the so-called gentler sex; and, Miss Guernsey, not the Miss Guernsey who played tennis but the other Miss Guernsey, who played golf, and the Adjutant.

It will be seen that the Royal Mac Turks' list of casualties was heavy. Practically the regiment has never recovered tone. But the final blow, the appalling catastrophe that robbed it, as a corps, of prestige for ever, was the collapse of the Senior Major. His passion for directing private theatricals, his private opinion of himself as an amateur actor of extraordinary genius and unacknowledged merit, accelerated his end. His artless craze had proved catching; the regiment travelled with a fit-up complete enough to rouse the envy of any manager touring the third-class towns, rivalries budded and flourished, and several times productions on which much money had been expended were nipped in the bud, owing to the plenitude, not the dearth, of leading men. But though Crichton's Romeo was a thing to see—I use the word in its absolute sense, because Crichton's voice invariably left him when the curtain went up—and though the Adjutant's rendering of Cartonesque comedy-parts would have given their original professional exponents new ideas upon the subject of light comedy, the tonnage of the Senior Major's tragedy was never for an instant in doubt. He created the most astonishing headache-effects in *Othello*, and when he played Claude Melnotte and threw down the gold, the act was performed with such dramatic force that the bag usually burst like a bombshell,

sending the circular discs of metal contained therein skipping into every corner of the stage. Critics of provincial newspapers, looking back upon the Senior Major's performances through a hazy mist of champagne, shed ink and admiration equally, and the Senior Major waxed bumptious and developed side. Long previous to the arrival of the Mac Turks at Shoredge Barracks he had become a professed authority upon the management of the human voice, and in a certain hour consented to teach the eldest Miss Hermit elocution while she waited. Now, the Senior Major was the only married officer in the regiment, if we except one, the doctor, who had taken to himself a professional lady-nurse for helpmeet some months previously; and the hour was an evil hour for the Senior Major, in which he undertook to instruct Miss Hermit in the *rôle* of Desdemona. Had the wife of the Senior Major been, like her lord, an earnest student of the Shakespearean drama, the complications which ensued might have been softened down. Had Rosabel Hermit proved less enthusiastic and thorough-going as a pupil, they—the complications—might altogether have been avoided. I quote this as the recorded opinion of Sir Frankish Veille. But the jury—probably leavened with Baconians—did not spare the Senior Major. The verbal picture of that hapless enthusiast, as drawn by the counsel for the petitioner, combined the duplicity of Iago with the fiendish wickedness of Richard the Third. Rosabel came in for several sprinklings of the tarbrush, but the counsel considered her to be, upon the whole, as a young woman, more weak than wicked. And Mrs. Senior Major got her decree *nisi*, with custody of the three olive-branches, and maintenance, and the Senior Major—well, the bag did not burst when he hurled it down; too much had gone out in fees, subpoenas, and other things. He is now playing heavy fathers with a South African

touring company, and—and Rosabel is a member of the chorus at the Jollity Theatre, and walks on nightly, one of a bevy of magnificently attired, coiffed, corseted, dentally-smiling and jewelled beauties. "Rosie the Hermit," the *Blue 'Un* familiarly calls her, and her motor-brougham fetishes her from the theatre every night. She has been interviewed by *The Scratch*, and photographically reproduced in a thousand poses. So Rosabel did not study Desdemona for nothing, it would seem.

Upon a very rainy day, with muffled brass and water-proof-swathed drums, the Royal Mac Turks—apparently a smart and dashing, metaphorically a limp and debilitated corps—quitted Shore-edge Barracks and marched out of Shipsea. Mrs. and Miss Costello bowed past in a smart victoria, paid for, like the Parisian attire of the two occupants, out of the Pott-Baysthorpe damages. Outside Hairfern's the florists, a well-known bath-chair was standing. Its fluffy, gold-haired, violet-eyed, angelic-faced occupant glanced over the bouquet which Joran, Second Navigating Lieutenant of H.M.S. *Blunderer* had just bought and handed to her. But Debadie went by at a long swinging step without returning the glance the partner of his sorrows vouchsafed him. At the station well-known faces were to be recognised on the platform: Miss Maynard, who hastily imprinted a pearl-powder silhouette of her piquant profile on Beauty Crichton's sleeve as she pressed a dressmaker's bill into his hand; the "Hairy Caterpillar," who came to see off another man, ignoring Gerry Bray-broke's pitiful, imploring glances. Both the Guernsey girls were there, a very callow Marine Artilleryman dividing their attentions. Rosabel Hermit and the Senior Major were both missing; the curtain had rung up at the Law Courts for the last time that morning, when the routed regiment of the once invincible Royal Mac Turks folded its barrack bedsteads and sorrowfully slunk away.

TAKEN IN WAR

THE Colonel came home upon leave—the only leave spent upon English soil for fifteen years—and it was patent at the first glance that he had made a mistake. Even Grandmamma, as she hung round the grizzled neck of her “own boy Jim,” now a boy no longer, was conscious that a shadow, dark brown in colour, blurred that resplendent luminary, whose rays she had fondly prayed—in that very imprudent letter the aunts and uncles were so much against her sending—to bless the declining of her day of life. She hung, I say, upon the Colonel’s broad, bowed shoulders, and covered his brick-red cheeks with kisses and tears, and wept, and made excuses for, and blamed, her firstborn all in a breath.

“ Of course, you are old enough to know your own mind, dear ”—if a man does not do so at forty-five, it may confidently be surmised that he has not got one to know—“ and it may be quite charming, to those who are used to it; but I don’t like the c-colour, dear—I don’t quite like the colour ! ”

And the gallant chief, who had led the 6th Bijri Light Horse to death and glory through so many columns of war correspondence, listened with a lack-lustre eye, and fluttered Grandmamma’s cap-ribbons with filial breaths that savoured of Cognac. In a serge suit made by a native tailor—after, but evidently not upon, the European model—he did not look so splendid as in the turban, long japanned boots, and blue and silver panoply of the portrait in the boudoir, before which, the family joke had it, Grandmamma used to

strew flowers and burn Bruges ribbon. Indeed, I whispered as much to Billy when we got outside the dining-room door, after saying a "How do you do, uncle ?" apiece, and being introduced as William and Marietta—a formula which never failed to spoil our manners. And Billy agreed, and saying, "Come on, Polly," drew me away upstairs to peep at the Shadow.

The door of the room that held It was ajar. We peeped in. A living bundle—heliotrope and white, with a gleam of gold about it here and there—squatted in the middle of the hearthrug before the glowing fire. It rocked itself to and fro, and cried "*Ahi!*" And long black hair, like ropes of silk, came tumbling down as the veil was pulled aside, and two shining brown arms, upon which golden bangles jingled, went up to tear the hair, and we scampered away frightened—we did not quite know at what; and Billy said if I would give him my Rob Roy tartan stamp-box to put fish-hooks in, he would tell me something he had found out; and when I had given it to him, he whispered:

"She's got a ring in her nose—a diamond ring."

And I smote him for telling stories, and believed I had done so righteously until I saw that ring for myself.

She was the wife of Uncle Jim, Colonel Jim of the Light Horse, and consequently our aunt—Aunt Lela. "*Lela*," I have since learned, signifies "lamb" in the Urdu. Decidedly, her sponsors might have chosen a more appropriate name.

She sat upon the carpet and ate curry, pinching it up, together with the rice, into balls with her beautiful golden-rosy fingers. They had opal-tinted nails, those fingers. Long years afterwards I recognised these nails—the mother's legacy—upon hands fairer in colour, but not less lithe and lovely in shape, and remembered that their tint was a stigma, not a charm.

An ayah had accompanied her—a tiny, mouse-like, flat-headed little woman, called Manda. Manda used to call me *Missy baba*, and Billy *Bhil sahib*. She proved to be more of a Conservative than Aunt Lela, in the way of sticking to a vegetable diet and drinking only from the brass *lota* she had brought with her. She stayed until the baby—I forgot to mention that morsel of humanity before—was a few months older, and then was deported by P. and O. back to her native Bombay. The baby cried very much after she went, but Aunt Lela coerced it into quietude by the application of a slipper—a small but stinging implement of correction, as Manda had had reason to know. Grandmamma interfered, and there was a Row Royal.

There was generally a Row Royal going on. The desire to understand with completeness remarks which might possibly be made by third persons with reference to herself was a great factor in the rapid improvement of Aunt Lela's English. She proved to be especially adept in the ornate use of adjectives ordinarily considered to be the exclusive property of the sterner sex. The gardener, who had at first objected to her habit of spreading her carpet in the orangery, learned to quail beneath the scourges of her wrath. When she would tear down the snowy balls of blossom from the branches to pelt her Persian cat—a gray-fleeced, beryl-eyed, feather-tailed Angora had arrived among the baggage—and rifle the pots of tuberose for the decking of her black satiny braids, he only groaned or grunted.

"He hang he head, that ugly olda man, and go away," said Aunt Lela, showing the double row of shining pearls that lurked behind her purply-red lips. "When he look at me, he feel a great afraid."

And then she rocked upon her hips, reaching upwards to pull savagely at a dropping fern-frond, and sang in strange

gutturals, with queer crooning turns and windings, and odd harkings back to the minor key.

“What does it mean?” I asked, standing before my new aunt in pinafored inquisitiveness.

“Something this:

‘I beautiful as full moon,
Out to walk on summer’s night,’”

said Aunt Lela, “*Aoo!*” and she yawned, adding: “*Jhana, suar ka bachcha!*”—an appellation which I have since found out to be uncomplimentary—“You go ‘way. I want-a-sleep!”

And she did sleep, curled up among her striped and scarlet cushions like a shining snake, or something as beautiful to look at and as dangerous to touch. And she woke up in a bad temper, and threw a tea-tray and a knife at the Colonel, and long, sibilant gutturals and clashing nasal consonants went to and fro between the infuriated pair, and teeth were ground and feet stamped, and strange gods violently appealed to, and there was, in fact, an unusually highly-developed specimen of the Row Royal—I should call it the Row Imperial, perhaps. It says much regarding the character of our new aunt, that Billy, whose matrimonial projects were, as a rule, largely comprehensive, announced no intention of marrying her when he should grow up to be a man.

It was after this—I should mention that in early youth my chief fault was inordinate curiosity as to the doings of my elders—that I found Uncle Jim having a private talk with Grandmamma. The Colonel had improved since his return to his native climate. He did not look so red in the face, nor were his eyeballs so streaky, nor did he smell so much of brandy. But nobody could have mistaken him for a happy man: and when I crept into Grandmamma’s

sanctum, he was sitting, like a sorrowful big child, on a hassock at her knees, and the lavender cap-ribbons were tenderly hovering over his baldish crown.

“And where did it happen, my dear ?” asked Grandmamma, timidly. I did not see that it was necessary to proclaim my presence with beat of drum, though I was rather an honourable little girl than otherwise. I wanted so very much to know where it had happened. So I sat down in the shadow of the peacock screen, while Uncle Jim began, blundering and trying back, like a dull schoolboy over a problem in Euclid.

“It was in the Afghan racket”—he alluded to the Second War, then little more than a year old—“after we’d routed the hornets out of Ali Musjid. I got my C.B. there—and found *her*.” He gnawed his moustache. “She’d been left behind——” he broke down and coughed.

“By her parents,” Grandmamma said, mellowly. “Poor thing !”

“By her guardian—of sorts,” went on Uncle Jim, labouring with another bronchial obstacle. “A Ghilzai chief—devil of a swell fellow—who was a deal too much taken up with saving his own skin to look after his wom—his ward. And I heard screaming, and it was some Ghurkas who wanted to loot her *almás*—her bangles and trinkets, y’know. And I sent her to the rear with a troop-sergeant; and when they brought her up for me to look at, I found that she spoke a dialect of the Urdu, and was as handsome as the—she is, you know !”

He said it heavily, despairingly, and from the shadow of the lavender ribbons a tear dropped upon the baldish patch.

“And ten months afterwards I married her,” he ended, lamely.

“Oh, why, my dear ?” Grandmamma broke out, with a

little moan. Uncle Jim's big neck turned very red at the back.

"It was that arm of mine broke out again—the arm that got smashed by a conical bullet at Jagallath. I never knew they'd sniped me, and that I was bleeding, until I dropped off my charger, as empty as a leech with his tail cut off. Inflammation and fever set in, and bits of bone kept coming out—an awful mess altogether—and I was deuced ill, and the Regimental *hakims*—liars both!—told me I was going to die. And I made up my mind, because of the youngster. Men are soft at such times; and if it should turn out to be a girl, I kept thinking, I couldn't have borne . . . Some of it was fever, and some of it was the chaplain. He meant well, the idiot! And he baptized Lela in one of my silver racing-cups. Her second name's Emily—after you"—Grandmamma did not seem flattered—"and we were married five minutes afterwards, and—by some infernal fluke—I never died, after all!" Uncle Jim concluded, with bluff disappointment. The line of demarcation dividing the pathetic from the ridiculous is narrow, as we know. Upon the Colonel's tragic regret broke in the squall of an indignant baby.

"What can be the matter with the dear child?" wondered Grandmamma, whose tender heart had not been steeled by the note of buff in baby's complexion.

Uncle Jim cocked his ear and listened as the roars broke out again—roars punctuated with sharp, not unfamiliar sounds.

"She's whacking it with her slipper, because it won't stop crying for the *ayah*," he announced.

"Oh, stop her, my dear!" Grandmamma entreated; and while her lavender cap-strings trembled with outraged maternity, Uncle Jim padded heavily out of the room and upstairs. I ventured to follow. He set his shoulder

against the bolted nursery-door without waiting to turn the handle, and shoved, and the slight fastenings cracked and gave way. Baby's roar ceased; but other sounds succeeded—a shrill outburst of feminine vituperation in an unknown vernacular; the Colonel's deep, rattling reply; a struggle, short and sharp, and then a dull smack and thud upon the carpeted floor. Then the door opened, and Uncle Jim came out with lowering brow and bloodshot eyes, a swollen V-shaped vein upon his forehead, and a bleeding wound upon the back of his left hand. Someone cried out—it must have been Grandmamma—and he said huskily:

“It’s nothing. Her teeth did it. I knocked her down. A backhanded blow.” He said again, “An open-handed blow; and, by Heaven, she deserved it! Go in, one of you, and get out the little shaver. I forgot, and she might kill it or something.”

But when they went in, the baby was quite intact, and Aunt Lela was gathering herself up—a rumpled bundle of loveliness—and smiling in a bright but not exactly a pleasant way. And things blew over, and only a strip of black court-plaster on the back of the Colonel’s hand, and a swollen blue mark upon his wife’s lip, remained to tell of the Row Imperial.

But a few mornings later Uncle Jim was not to be seen, when Bill and I came home from a bird’s-nesting scramble in the plantations. The doctor’s dogcart stood at the hall door, and the doctor was being shown up, in company with a black-leather medicine-chest. And Grandmamma and the aunts were nowhere to be seen. In the conservatory Uncle Jim’s wife lolled among her cushions, nursing her *sitar*, and thrumming upon the strings as she sang a queer little song between her teeth, while a hiss and buzz and stir, as of a nest of angry snakes, was the accompaniment.

"Where is Uncle Jim?" I asked, sturdily, standing before her with my muddy shoes well apart, and a string of speckled birds'-eggs in one hand.

"Uncle Jim he sick," replied Aunt Lela. "He very bad inside. When people get so in my country, they die and go to the *ghāt*, or are put in long box and buried in hole like your-country dogs." She was in an ugly mood. She rolled and writhed in aptly illustrative contortions to express the greatness of Uncle Jim's torment, and then lay still and laughed back in her throat, and pulled out of her bosom a red string with something like a little silver box at the end of it—a box rather long than square, with a fluted melon-shaped knob at each end.

"What's that?" I asked, with interest. I was a square, stolid child of inquiring mind, as I have before hinted.

"This what I keep for good of those I love," replied Aunt Lela, looking the reverse of loving. "It is a god of my country. When people sick or something, they get cured—by my god."

"What kind of sickness does it cure?" I asked.

And Aunt Lela said, drawing up the corners of her eyes and lips, "The sickness of Life."

Then she went back to her original burden, and I left her hugging her knees and rocking her *sitar*, and crooning, "Poor old Jim! He very bad inside. Poor old Jim!" dozens of times over. She certainly struck me as unsympathetic at that moment. But later on, when admitted to the patient's sick-room, she redeemed her wifely reputation by tearing her hair and wailing until led forcibly away.

Uncle Jim must have been very ill, everybody was so frightened. Strange fever burned his hands and crackled his lips, weird chills set him shuddering, and uncanny cramps rent him, momentarily, like possessing demons. Yes, Uncle Jim was in a very bad way indeed, as he lay

among the tossed bed-clothes, with his bloodshot eyeballs turned up to the ceiling, his blue lips sternly compressed, and his veinous hands clawing at the blankets.

Billy, who had been peeping into that grim chamber, came downstairs, stumping on his short legs, a very grave little boy indeed. We discussed the situation in the deserted schoolroom, whither we had been sent to be out of the way.

"It's a kind of cramp," said Billy, "and comes of Indian fevahs. I heard the doctor say so. I'd got this," he went on, showing the gardener's japanned tin powder-flask, "to make Spitting Devils." He alluded to the dear but dangerous Vesuvius of adventurous youth, which, when compounded of dampened gunpowder, placed in rows upon the schoolroom table, and lighted with the simultaneous match, emitted sparks for five minutes on end without ceasing. "But now I don't feel as if I took any interest in Spitting Devils." He laid his hand upon his waistband. "I wish I hadn't eaten that lump of sugar!" he sighed.

"What sugar, greedy?" I asked.

"Coffee sugar," replied Billy. "Nothing seems to do Uncle Jim any good in his cramps but hot coffee—hot as he can drink it—and cups, and cups. Aunt Lela makes it—in a brass pot. Nobody but her can make it stwong enough"—at that early age my brother was shaky in his "R's"—"and I took a piece of sugar off the tray outside the door, and dipped it in the cup, and now my froat burns inside, and I feel sorry in my stomach."

Billy was poor company in this frame of mind. I left him, and went upstairs. A red fire burned in the nursery grate, and Aunt Lela, her tears dried and her hair in order, was bending over a little brass pot from which rose a rich aroma of boiling coffee. As I looked—through a crack in the panel started only a day or so before by Uncle Jim

impetuous shoulder—I saw her draw the little silver box from her breast and unscrew one of the silver melon-knobs. Then she shook some powder into the boiling coffee, and sang a verse of her song as she stirred it; and the look upon her face made me feel cold.

“What does she do that for?” I whispered to myself. She had said the medicine in the silver box was good to cure sickness—the sickness called Life. When you were cured of life, you were dead, of course. Was Aunt Lela like the poisoning people in the story-books—Madame de Brin—(I couldn’t remember the rest of her name) and the lady in *One in a Thousand?* But she only poisoned herself. Harassed with these doubts, I sought refuge in the sterner intellect of Billy.

“Girls always think things are going to be like they are in books. Don’t you know none of the books are true except the Bible and *Pilgrim’s Progress?*” he said, disdainfully.

“Remember that pain in your throat,” I said. “You only got a little drop of coffee on that lump of sugar; but if you’d had any more, you might have been squealing out now, like Uncle Jim.”

The bolt went home. “We’ll go upstairs,” said Billy, “and tell him that she’s making it too stwong.”

So we went.

“Go away, children, at once!” said one of the aunts, appearing in the doorway of Bluebeard’s chamber. The doctor frowned as he held a measuring-glass to the light, and Grandmamma shook a warning finger from her post by the pillow.

“Please, we want to speak to Uncle Jim,” said Billy, advancing.

“Let the little beggars in,” said a hoarse voice from among the tumbled bedclothes. We were dreadfully

frightened as Uncle Jim hoisted himself up on one elbow. He was so much like the picture of the dead man Lazarus sitting up in the tomb. And at that moment Aunt Lela came undulating into the room in a resplendent purple-red *sari*, with a rose behind one of her lovely ears, and a cup of coffee in her hand.

"Hurry up, whatever you want to—— Hang the cramp!" groaned Uncle Jim. He reached out a hand to take the steaming cup with lips already beginning to twitch, and the pupils of his eyes were dreadfully dilated.

"Don't dwink that, Uncle Jim!" said Billy, desperately. "Because Polly sawed her"—he pointed to Aunt Lela—"putting some stuff into it out of a box, and we think she did it to make you worse, instead of better."

A sudden silence fell, and a fierce red flush spread over Uncle Jim's face, ghastly before, and in his eye suspicion and anger woke, and looked out menacingly.

"*Bikh!* you jade!" he screamed, and shook his fist at Aunt Lela. "Poison, you she-devil, datura or . . . ! Why was I dolt enough not to guess before? If I had you in these hands, I'd——"

He made a convulsive effort to leap out of bed, and fell back groaning.

"Take that cup from her, doctor. You're guilty, you——! I see it in your eyes."

Then Aunt Lela spat twice upon the floor, and, relinquishing the coffee-cup to the doctor, folded her arms upon her heaving bosom and spoke for five minutes by the clock in comparatively excellent English. When she had fully explained herself, the butler and the doctor led her, panting and quivering and grinding her teeth, out of the room, into temporary retirement.

Uncle Jim recovered from that attack of Revenge, but considering existence conducted upon conjugal terms

with Aunt Lela too hazardous a thing, he ultimately devised a separation. The baby remained with Grandmamma, while Aunt Lela, handsomely provided for, returned to her native Presidency. Uncle Jim, his leave having expired, resumed command of the Bijri Light Horse; and, in the summer of the fifth year following upon his return, died suddenly—it has been rumoured, of a temporary reconciliation. But murder is so difficult to prove in India, and the disconsolate widow, having commuted her pension and realised upon such articles of value as lay within the reach of her rapacious claws, vanished out of sight amid those labyrinthine passages, those unfathomable depths, those unknown jungles, those dimly guessed at abysses that lie beyond the carved sandal-wood portals of the Zenana.

A SIN OF THE INTENTION

EDGEBOURN woke with the shimmer of the June sunshine on his eyelids, and lay still, drowsily wondering why he felt so sure that it was going to be such a capital day. Then the porter's key clicked in the lock of the outer door, and the bath-cans bumped in the narrow entry; his old black Persian cat jumped purring upon the bed, and all at once he remembered that he was a man who had had a rise in life; that he had sold his Academy picture for quite a large sum, and that he had a sitter—a distinguished sitter—coming that afternoon. At this juncture the cat and the bedclothes were hurled to the four winds. Edgeborn got up.

Emerging presently to breakfast, ruddy and fresh, and picturesquely attired, his flow of spirits was somewhat checked by the discovery that the porter's wife had sent in bacon and eggs again. Edgeborn ate as much as he could, and determined that an effort must be made towards the achievement of a special lunch: Miss Deland might expect lunch; there was no knowing. He must see Mrs. Kitt about it. Heaven send that she might be graciously disposed!

"Suppose she sends in a group of chops—those thick ones with the long fat ends—round a pyramid of mashed potatoes," he reflected; "or a rhomboidal joint—one of those mysterious joints that no human skill can balance upright on the dish, or carve without mangling!"

There had been some reason of late to apprehend that she would not send anything at all. Her monthly book

was at that moment balanced on top of the slop-basin. He glanced at the total and felt shuddery about the spine. Seven pounds seven shillings for four weeks' baths, bed-makings, breakfasts, and lunches ! And he had hardly had a man in to grub, or encouraged a model to stay for what Topsy Tirlepin called "a snack," and Maria Giannina "quattro risi" ! Still, the "Death of Swanhild" was sold—sold to the opulent American manager who had brought over his company from New York that season ; and from the same patron he had received a commission to paint the portrait of Zara Deland—the exquisite, the incomparable Zara, whose praises were on every tongue, and in whose art a revelation had been vouchsafed to earnest devotees of the stage. What a chance for a rising man ! What a subject for an artist ! Edgeborn knew that portrait was destined to make him famous.

The rising man, who intended to climb so very high before many months were over, pushed away his cup and plate and rested his elbows among the débris of the breakfast, and began, mentally, to work out the composition of the portrait: to balance values, and formulate schemes of colour, and deliberate between this, that, and the other pose, as though the slender stage goddess were already before him, sitting in the great tapestry chair on the felt-covered model's throne. He hugged the thought that his good fortune was as yet known to none of his companions and associates; like himself dwellers under studio sky-lights, earning their bread as he had earned his, perforce, until three days ago, with millboard and India-ink or walnut stain, as illustrators of periodical literature or books of the adventurous and romantic school.

He had eaten of their bread and smoked of their tobacco, as they of his; he had lent money and borrowed it, and they had done the like. He had been an inhabitant of

North-West Studios ever since he left the Academy; the lives of the others were known to him, and their few secrets had been told beside his hearth. He had discussed with them, during ten years past, all subjects, public and private, in the parallelogram of courtyard round which the red-brick studios were gathered. They had criticised his work and praised it, and taken his censure with respect, and his commendation with gratitude. And they had been regularly summoned for the Queen's taxes, on one and the same day. But Edgeborn's big slice of luck—the great chance everybody had predicted would come—had come to him three days ago, and he had not shared it yet. He was, as they had all thought for so long, an excellent fellow; but the consciousness of his success worked in him like yeast. He felt himself rising above the earthen pan that had held him. Was it possible he had been content with these plodding, inferior associates, with these sordid, dingy surroundings, for ten years past!

The MacWaugh blundered in upon these reflections; grim and gaunt and grisly in the rough tweed garments that hung upon the angles of his huge frame more loosely from day to day. He had a grievance, and in his rude way sought sympathy.

“Is it no’ enough to cause a man swear?”—he looked round for a seat.

“Take the chair you broke last time,” said Edgeborn.

“I demand of ye, is it no’ juist madly vexin’?” He extended a coarse freckled hand across the table, and stabbed with the gnarled and horny forefinger at the centre of Edgeborn’s silk waistband. “That a man’s own or-r-gans should rise up in rebellion against him is ganging ower far—ower far.” He stopped and snorted.

“Put it a little clearer, will you?” said Edgeborn, without good-humour.

"Ye find me obscure? Am no' wanderin', man!" said The MacWaugh, with solemnity. "I am sober—and it ten o'clock in the day. Ye will be aware I have been drinking to the utmaist o' my capacity these months o' late?"

He bent his grizzled brows inquiringly on Edgeborn.

"Heard you at it," assented Edgeborn sulkily, "most of the days and all the nights."

The MacWaugh smiled a smile of modest satisfaction.

"The nichts will be my especial time."

The beaming look of gratification clouded over, he blew a sigh and crushed a saucer with his powerful elbow as he ran his fingers despondently through his shaggy hair. "All that is over and gone the now," said The MacWaugh sadly. "My stomach has turned against the whisky. And ye will be knowing how strongly my hairt has been set on drinking myself to deeth. Every man—ye're aware o' the tenets o' my creed—is free to dispose o' himself his own way. And that was mine, and I was making fair progress on it if I am no' grossly mistaken . . . and now! Toch! I am juist mad to think of it."

"Couldn't you get on to rum?" Edgeborn suggested. "It's awfully injurious, the doctors tell you."

The granitic features of The MacWaugh were relaxed in doubt.

"Rum! Ay, the one liquor I have never tried. I can no' imagine how I came to overluik it." He rose from his groaning chair. "Rum! I will try the prescreetion wi'out delay, though am fearing"—he shook his head bodingly—"am fearing wi' puir results—puir results. Naething whatever will this misguided crater"—he struck himself a resounding blow upon the waistcoat—"asseemilate, but cauld water"—he shuddered—"cauld tea, an' cauld milk. Milk!" He shuddered more faintly, and

rolled his eyes, the whites of which were curiously opalescent, in rather a ghastly way.

" You must be in an awful condition inside, you know," said Edgeborn, roused to a faint degree of interest, as the huge form of The MacWaugh lumbered to the door. " Coats of the stomach quite destroyed, and so forth. I have heard that when they—when the——" he hesitated.

" Meaning the houpless drunkards ?" interrogated The MacWaugh.

" —When they arrive at that condition—reach the stage of rejecting the alcohol that the system continues to crave——"

" It does, sairly. Man, Edgeborn," said The MacWaugh, putting out a great shaking hand, " ye cannot realise what the craving is. But I interrupted ye. When the meeserable an' debauched inebriate"—he seemed to manifest a certain relish in the employment of strong terms—" has reached the stage under discussion——"

" Oh ! he's precious near the end, that's all !" said Edgeborn.

The MacWaugh drew a rattling breath and straightened his huge bowed shoulders. He retraced his steps, and shook hands warmly.

" Ye have a wonderful gift of sympathy, Edgeborn, man. I never luik in on ye but I am the better for your wor-rds. It's a cheering way—juist a cheering way."

He ground Edgeborn's rings gratefully into his flesh, and tramped through the hall back to his studio next door. He whistled "The Blue Bells of Scotland" with vigorous tunelessness as he rang the electric bell that communicated with the porter's lodge, and sent Kitt to get the rum.

Edgeborn cast a glance at his swing mirror, lighted a cigarette, threw a cap upon his crisp yellow curls, and

strode out also. He had to negotiate with the feminine Kitt; and muscular proportions, straight features, sea-blue eyes, and a crisp golden beard were, he knew, together with the curls already mentioned, excellent adjuncts to the persuasive tongue that sought to soften the heart of an irate supply-vendor of the opposite sex.

So he stepped out upon the gravelled parallelogram of courtyard, with its central plats of grass and scrubby trees. There was sunshine on the low-tiled studio roofs and the red-brick walls, where the purple clematis old Karl Voss, patriarch of the place, painter of animals and lover of flowers and children, had grown from seed, burned in starry clusters against the ivy. Old Karl himself, white-bearded, hale, and handsome, despite his seventy years, trotted up and down the asphalte side-path in his woollen cap and capacious rubber goloshes, smoking a beaded Indian calumet, and stopping every moment to peer benevolently through his large dim spectacles at some struggling leaf or blossom trying to grow and unfold in spite of London soot. A *Daily Telegraph* had been spread out upon the gravel and weighted with a pebble at each corner, and Millars, the Academy medallist, who had given extraordinary promise of greatness and never kept his word, was practising overhead fly-casting with a new cork-handled fly-rod belonging to Ellen Angelo; while Ellen, who was a journalist, and lived in the centre of this artistic community because she said it was "so sociable," stood by and looked on. Millars possessed for her analytical mind a morbid attraction.

"You see," she said to Edgeborn, "he is unique in his way. Against the clearest evidence—continually brought before him—to prove that he cannot do anything, he goes on firmly believing that there is nothing he cannot do. Look at him this moment, festooning himself with yards

of waterproof line, in the blissful conviction that he is a Study, while we regard him simply as a Spectacle. Oh ! thank you so much, Mr. Millars, for showing me how it ought to be done."

" You will remember next time, won't you ?" said Millars, with modest superiority.

" I shall never forget," replied Ellen with conviction, as she reeled her line up and disjointed her rod. Then she turned to Edgeborn, with the keen, observant look he knew and disliked, and pursed her lips into a soundless whistle.

" White ducks, red silk cummerbund ; what the Yankees call a ' clean biled ' shirt. I did just the same when my first novel came out."

" What ?" queried Edgeborn rather grumpily.

" Put on all my best clothes and peacocked round the town."

" I haven't an idea what you mean," said Edgeborn.

" That was what the people said who reviewed the book. But I had my day of pride." She threw back her handsome rough head, crowned with its plenteous coils of deep red hair, and bent her keen gray glance on him again.

" Come," she said, " no shamming ignorant with me. I knock up against a good many theatrical people in my line of business ; I have heard that Dominic Crow has bought the ' Swanhild,' and that you're to paint the Deland's portrait. It's a big chance for you. I'm glad of it, with all my heart. But to think of you keeping it all to yourself !—of never telling—even *her*!"

" What time have I had ?" expostulated Edgeborn. " It only happened three days ago, and——"

" Three days—seventy-two hours."

" Did you expect me to go round with a bell and announce between each bang of the clapper that I'd had a

stroke of luck? You knew," said Edgeborn, "I wasn't that kind of man."

"No," said Ellen, in an odd voice. "I knew you weren't that kind of man."

"Look here! Have you told"—he scraped the gravel with his neat brown leather boot—"have you told—any body?"

"No. Though if I had it would have served you right."

"Miss Angelo!"

"I am vexed with you. I should be absolutely furious—if you were a plainer man. Women are such fools—aren't they?—about personal appearance."

"My dear Miss Angelo!" Edgeborn beamed on her, irresistibly tickled by the compliment. "You know that rather than forfeit your good opinion—"

"Ah! I know. You can do wonders with that pretty voice of yours. Come, are you going to tell the good news to Avis Waynflete, or leave it to a chance paragraph in the penny papers to enlighten her?"

"I'll tell her—I will, upon my honour. Promise me that until I speak you will not say a word."

"I promise you—or rather your beard and shoulders. But go and pay your morning devoirs at least. . . . Last night I looked in and found her sitting on the sofa in a tragic huddle, with the world lying broken at her feet—because you had not been near her these three days," said Ellen, with cynical laughter upon her strong lips and moisture on her eyelashes. "If Millars had dropped in then he would have found the expression he is always wailing because he cannot get—the bewildered look that Eve wore when she was suddenly turned out of Paradise. Though the Paradises that we women walk in now are not real, like Eve's. The sparkling cascades are rice and spangles, and the trees are made of laths and canvas, and

the sylvan perspectives are painted on the flat, and the skies are blue canvas. Nothing is real except the flaming sword. . . . You are going to her now ?”

“A moment later. I have to look in at the lodge.”

“The lodge ! It ‘dominates the scene,’ as interviewers say of a prima donna’s piano or a politician’s phrenological developments. I have bowed beneath the yoke of Mrs. Kitt and her fried eggs too long. I shall invest in a gas-stove and a Foundling orphan, and cook and ‘do’ for myself; that will be the end of it. ‘Bye ! I’m going back to work. Oh ! Stop !’”

Edgeborn, already some paces distant, paused, and looked back.

“Next time you see Gian Battista, explain to him, in your Italian—mine doesn’t seem to make any impression—that I refuse to avail myself of his services as a model, not because I do not admire him, but because I do not know how to paint. He is dreadfully wounded on my doorstep twice a week, and showers photographs of himself, in costume and out, through the letter-slit at all seasons. Clear me in his opinion, won’t you ? I can’t make him understand me, and I hate to hurt his feelings.”

Ellen went her way.

“Why on earth does the woman live in a studio ?” said Edgeborn.

“Begause,” said old Karl, looking up from a patch of larkspurs, “it a nature is, which in its surroundings some colour, warmth, and light craves. Ho ! little spiky blue-ling”—he touched a blossom tenderly with one gnarled rheumatic finger—“they are moth fools who say it is bedder to krow in a pot in a fosty room, than to live in the liddle bed in de smoky grass-plod and rub shoulders with the marikolds and the mignonette, and by the cats each

night to be polka-danced upon. Gombany is gombany, and symbathy is symbathy all the world over; and a woman like dat is worth tree—*ach!* ten tousand men to me, when I haf my influenzas got.” He straightened his bent shoulders, and turned the faded blue eyes, screened by the dusty spectacles, observantly on Edgeborn. “So! I was forgedding. . . . Your pigdure is sold!”

“How did you know that?”

“I saw de newce dis morning in de golumns of a theadrigal baber. *De Mummer*, dat was the name.”

“How did you get hold of a theatrical paper? I thought you never took in any paper at all!”

“Dat is so, but dis is how I learn de newce. When I take my little morning walk upon the asphalt here, up and down slip-slop in dese big shoes, long before you are out of your beds, comes de baber-boy and leaves de babers on de steps beside de liddle milk-cans. Den I pick one up; I shake him oud and sgim de cream of what he has to say. Den I fold him up and put him back again. So dat nobody may be chealous, I give dem all a turn; and dis morning it was de turn of Ellen Anchelo. She is de one who takes de theadrigal babers, and so—you see. Odderswise I should haf to pay a penny of my own. Well, you are happy, and I congratulade you. And de little Inspiration—she is glad?”

“She does not know yet, unless you have told her,” said Edgeborn.

“I? *Ach, nein!* It is not pizness of mine to spoil your goot bleasure in telling de newce. Well, now dat you are rich gomes de wedding, hey? I will not to de breakfast come, begause of my cap and koloshes; but I will my best flowers for de table cut, I promise you.”

Everything and everybody conspired to annoy Edgeborn on that day. The poignant consciousness of her unpaid

bill rendered Mrs. Kitt stonily unsympathetic when appealed to upon the question of lunch.

"A little fish: filleted sole, for instance," Edgeborn suggested; "and a roast chicken with the usual accompaniments, and a cherry tart—one of your special tarts—and strawberries and cream to follow—eh ?"

"You'll have to wait!" said Mrs. Kitt, uttering the formula habitual to her when asked for anything.

"I should prefer to," said Edgeborn agreeably. "I do not expect the lady before two o'clock."

"She'll have to wait—if she comes to her time," said Mrs. Kitt inexorably, as a bell rang and a cardboard indicator popped up in the glass-faced frame behind the door and pointed to a number. "Who is it, Loosha ?" she called to her daughter.

"Number Seven," returned Miss Kitt, whose round black eyes were stealing furtively appreciative glances at Edgeborn's bright beard and broad shoulders. "It's Mr. Millars wants his beat-up egg. He says he can't support the strain of composition without beat-up eggs."

"He'll 'ave to wait !" ejaculated Mrs. Kitt, as, whisk in hand, she plunged into the inner kitchen.

"I have had a great piece of good fortune, Miss Kitt," said Edgeborn rather loudly, as the round-eyed daughter of the lodge drew shyly nearer.

"*Click-clack—click-clack ! Pr-f-s-s-'sh-'sh !*" went the egg-whisk.

"Law ! Mr. Edgeborn !"

"Guess what the good fortune is, Loosha ?"

"Law ! Mr. Edgeborn, how can I—— ? Unless you've sold your big picture."

"Have I only one big picture ?"

"I mean the one with Miss Waynflete in, 'ung up by 'er 'ands to the doorposts, with wild 'orses rampaging at her.

And have you got a lot of money for it ?" she added, perhaps with a vision of the limp red covers of the unpaid monthly book rising before her mind's eye.

"Loosha Kitt!" cried the maternal tones, "come in to your work, and don't stand goosacking there."

It was plain that Mrs. Kitt was in one of her most adamantine moods. Miss Kitt hurried in, and Edgeborn betook himself back to his studio, dolorously apprehensive of solutions in the continuity of lunch. He wished that Mr. Dominic Crow would send him the cheque for the picture there and then, but the Academy season was still at its height; he could not hope for that blessed piece of paper before the first week in August. To adopt Mrs. Kitt's formula, he would have to wait. But when that period of suspense was over, when he had his three hundred guineas for the "Swanhild," and the price of the portrait—half as much again—Edgeborn promised himself that at least one deserving human creature should be made thoroughly happy—as long as the money lasted. And when that was all gone there would be more to make.

He went back to his studio and began to set things in order with his delicate, lingering, dainty touch. There was little of the Bohemian in his character; he loved seemliness and grace as he hated dust and litter. Even in the midmost fever of artistic composition his curls and beard never became unbecomingly tangled—he never smeared himself with pigments after the fashion of Mivart or Anselm Maguire, who, a week before sending-in day, looked as if he had been rolling in a rainbow.

His Chippendale cabinets, his Sheraton chairs, Dutch pottery, and Urbino plaques seemed cheap and poor, and common in the new light in which he looked at his surroundings. His bits of old tapestry and Breton carved oak had lost their charm; every stain upon the floor-

felting or scratch upon the border of parquet showed up mercilessly. How would things look to the Deland eye ? He had obeyed a summons to the theatre where she acted on the preceding night, had been introduced to her in the green-room by Mr. Crow, and the glamour of her great stage eyes and melodious, low accents was upon him still. Perhaps a few flowers might improve the place ! A handful of roses in a copper bowl; a tall spear or two of iris in that old crackle vase. He set some pastilles burning in the jaws of a demon of Tokio ware, spread a yellowed sheet of square-noted sixteenth-century music on the rack of the spinet—a mellowed triumph of the disingenuous ingenuity of Wardour Street, and, on the spur of the idea, swung out.

The door of the studio occupied by Avis Waynflete stood wide open, like most of the other doors; the little hall beyond, hung with light draperies of some quaint-patterned Indian chintz, was specklessly neat and clean. Edgeborn went in without knocking. The large barn-like studio, with its pale gray-green walls and scant furniture and many canvases, was deserted. A high easel stood in the best light, bearing an unfinished water-colour study of a trail of Rambler roses that hung a little way beyond, pinned upon a screen and backed with a great sheet of white paper. Avis was not there, but in the glass conservatory beyond, attending to her flowers.

She wore a rough grayish-green serge skirt and a loose blouse of white silk, and, with the dazzling whiteness of her skin and the silvery reflections of her burnished pale hair, looked like a white flower, rising from a green whorl of down-folded leaves. She was not of low stature, but the delicate bend of her sweet, shrinking head and the pure upright slimness of her figure made her seem small and appear fragile. The rich earthy odour of musk and the

growing ferns upon the lower shelves rose up about her and mingled with the perfume of the heliotrope and the roses, in which she delighted, and for whose sweet sakes she denied herself many of the pleasant necessaries of life.

She moved slightly, hearing Edgeborn's step upon the floor, and the faintest tinge of rose came into her white cheeks. She looked up, and the intense crystalline blueness of her eyes struck him afresh as almost unearthly. Swanhild, daughter of Sigurd the Volsung, bound between the gates of the burg of King Jonakr, had cowed and quelled the fierce stallions let loose to destroy her with the gaze of eyes like those. As Swanhild Edgeborn had painted her, finding in her a generous, enthusiastic, and untiring model; and as his brush owned a gift of faithful reproduction, as he had considerable perception of colour, and a knack of effective composition, "Swanhild" had been a success.

But to Avis he was a great genius—a king among men, and she his bondmaid, who delighted in slavery. Since the days when they worked in the schools of the Academy together his meanest labour had been a great achievement, his lightest opinion an irrevocable law. She had always belonged to him, even before he asked her to be his, with such a certainty that she would give herself gratefully. As soon as he touched success, as soon as he could lay his hand upon the few hundreds necessary to begin the house-keeping of a young couple, they were to be married. Meanwhile she waited, adoring, submissive, and blissful in the consciousness of being his, of sharing his secrets, of lightening his troubles, of being privileged to listen to his complaints, and shining by-and-by with some reflection of the lustre of his fame.

He had not been near her for three days. The reproach in the face she lifted to him was no more than the dumb

rebuke of the drooping flower that one has forgotten to water; but, knowing why he had kept away, it stung him all the same.

“Asmund!”

“I could not come before,” he said, with hasty excuse. “There have been things to attend to,—work to do. Even now I cannot stay long; I have a sitter coming.”

“At last! Has the ‘Swanhild’ brought you a commission?” she cried, with quivering gladness.

“It might be partly through that,” Edgeborn owned.

“Is it somebody worth painting? Not a presentation portrait of an alderman or a County Council dignitary,” Avis shuddered, “all broadcloth and rubicund cheeks, like the last?”

“It is not quite so bad as that.”

“A child’s portrait, then?”

“N-o. Not quite a child’s. A lady’s,” said Edgeborn, with laborious indifference, wondering why he did not tell the truth and have done with it. For the first time he was conscious that her gentle identification of herself with him, her quiet conviction that she possessed the right to own his confidence, was irksome and annoying.

“A lady, you said. Old—or young?”

“Not old,” said Edgeborn, “but, at the same time, certainly not young.”

“A middle-aged woman?”

“A middle-aged woman. One may not do much with the subject, but still—there is always something to be learned, something to be gained.” He turned from the subject. “Have you no news for me?”

“Nothing that is not stale. That little picture that went to Manchester—a study of a Kentish cherry-orchard in bloom—you know that it is sold.”

“Yes, I know.”

"I shall have the money next month. Fifty pounds. And then, if you—if you! Dear, I know that you are pinched for money. You will take it and use it, and make me glad, I know."

His cheeks burned, and his throat smarted. He was on the point of telling her, but he bit his lip and refrained. After all, he had not been paid yet ; he had not touched Dominic Crow's money. He kissed her slight hand with some conscious grace of gesture, and told her how sweet and gentle and unselfish she was.

"And you—how strong and brave and patient!" said Avis, looking at him adoringly. "You have waited so long—so long! But the great day will come. Some rich art-patron will buy the 'Swanhild,' or else some other piece of good fortune will happen."

"Hopeful little Avis!" He smoothed her hair and patted her shoulder with a superior kind of tenderness.

"But I must be off; this woman is coming at two for the first sitting. It struck me to-day that the studio looked dingy—horribly dingy—and dull. So much depends on first impressions, doesn't it?"

"Shall I come over and tidy up for you?" Avis asked eagerly.

"No, no. I will not have you neglect your work—turn yourself into a housemaid for me! But if you would lend me a few flowers——?"

Avis cast him one swift glad look, and darted to her shelves. Her delicate fuchsias, purple and white, her carnations and pelargoniums, her heliotropes and roses, were all his for the asking. When he had gone with overflowing arms, she heaved a sharp sigh and sank down in her chair, as though the springs of life were broken.

So Ellen Angelo found her.

"My dear child! Has there been an earthquake?"

She surveyed the despoiled shelves, and picked up a little pot which rolled upon the floor. "Can it be that you have forgotten to pay the Queen's taxes, and have had a visit from the Sheriff or——"

"Asmund has been here, that is all," said Avis.

"Asmund has followed the example of his Viking fore-fathers, and laid waste the homestead with a vengeance."

"He wanted some flowers for his studio, and I let him have them. What harm was there?" Avis spoke with a certain acerbity. "Were they not mine to give?"

"What harm? None at all. A woman may always give; it is the one privilege men are not anxious to despoil her of. Her goods and chattels, or her body and soul, if they are worth having, there is always someone ready to say, 'Yes, thanks!' It is only when she wants something back that 'No' is said to her."

"Don't be angry, dear," said Avis, getting up and going to her.

"I am not angry. You're not to blame. You're in love with him—and so am I, for that matter," said Ellen queerly. "With such curls and such a torso, such shoulders, such a beard, and such a voice, how can one refuse him anything? You remember the Russian peasant-saying, '*He would talk you out of your clothes on the coldest day in the year, and then coax you out of your skin to make gloves with.*'"

Two bright geranium petals seemed to bloom in Avis's white cheeks.

"Ellen! Do you want to make me hate you?"

"No, dear," said Ellen placably. "Only I should like you to care for *him* a little less."

"I cannot measure out my love," said the girl proudly. "Why should I, when he gives me all his?"

"You remember the other Russian adage—'*He calls me*

his heart's idol, but the head he worships is under his own hat.'"

"Oh!" cried the outraged Avis. "And I thought you liked him so!"

"Haven't I said I'm in love with him? Ever since he came to the studio ten years ago, as poor as Job and as handsome as Hereward—I read novels then."

Avis could not but yield to laughter at the notion of Ellen being in love.

Ellen laughed too, but somewhat grimly, as she went back to finish her article.

Meanwhile Edgeborn, guided by that innate perception of the picturesque, which was, indeed, his strongest characteristic, was employed in making his studio beautiful. The MacWaugh, who looked in casually to tell him the rum prescription did not seem to work, was penetrated with admiration.

"Preparing the ground for a sitter, say ye? Toch! Ye have the faculty o' forethought, Edgeborn—forethought and tact. Tact is a grand thing!" He sat in the tapestried armchair upon the dais, unobservant of Edgeborn's dismay, and struck a sulphur match upon his boot and lighted his pipe, a venerable and foul briar-root, and began to discourse. "Tact," he said, "is ane o' the rungs in the ladder o' Fame. Mak' a braw show at starting. Dazzle their eyes wi' grandeur and wale o' tablespoons an' forks"—his eyes travelled to the daintily spread luncheon-table. "Feed them fu', though ye make out starving for the rest o' the week; and if ye never called sardines an' sliced cucumber *hors-d'oeuvres* before in your life, ca' them so then. Am thinking I lossed a grand chance once—for want o' tact. Some grandes once looked in on me—it was a Show Sunday—in mistake for Cleesy. Ye will be knowing Cleesy that wore his hair in a Florentine crop, an' a low-

neckit shirt, an' painted chocolate-box lids on the heroic scale an' ca'ed them pectures. Weel ! Cleesy——”

“ He's an R.A. now,” said Edgeborn.

“ I canna find it in my hairt to peety him,” said The MacWaugh, who held wild opinions concerning the Temple of British Art and its high priests. “ He has desairved his doom. But I was telling ye of these people. They drifted in an' swam round, keeking through their spy-glasses ; a dowager in a bonnet like the Tower o' Babel, and twa young ladies, perky bit things in feather boas wi' ane giggle between them. . . . An' when it dawned on them that I was no' Cleesy, wi' his Orange Pekoe in cups of Satsuma an' his sugared rose-leaves an' what not, they were just burning to get away ; but for civeelity. . . . Civeelity, ye will ken, is the mother o' lies, if the Devil is the father. Toch ! Weel, ane o' the young leddies, in the ignorance o' her hairt, askit o' me why I never painted anything but sea an' river pieces.” (The MacWaugh had attained to the culminating pitch of obscurity principally as a painter of the marine.) “ ‘ Why do ye,’ says she, ‘ paint naething but water ?’ Toch !” The MacWaugh stopped to chuckle.

“ Well ! You said—— ?” hinted Edgeborn, wishing that he would go.

“ I said, ‘ It is the Law o' Compensation, my leddy ’ (they were folks wi' handles to their names). ‘ Am never painting anything but water, because am never drinking anything but whisky.’ Man ! the effect o' that ! They gathered their skirts about them an' ran for their lives. Now, if I had had tact, ye ken, I would have resairved that joke for a more fitting occasion, an' merely described myself as an advocate o' temperance. But there's a carriage on the gravel, an' a double knock at your door. Toch ! Am doubting your sitter will find ye wi' a dis-

creditable veesitor. Can ye no' pretend I am a model ye are dismissing for the day ! I will return ye the three-an'-saxpence later on."

But Miss Deland, petite, seductive, and sinuously graceful, appeared in the doorway. A dapper little gentleman followed her, and upon their heels arrived an emissary from the lodge, upbearing a tray of cloudy tin covers. Edgeborn's hospitable apprehensions at sight of an extra guest were relieved by the assurance that Miss Deland never lunched, the exigencies of her profession compelling her to dine at five; and, resisting her entreaties that he would not hesitate to feed, he waved away the aggrieved Mrs. Kitt and her dishes, not without a secret doubt as to the possibility of being able, later on, to wave them back again.

Meanwhile, to cover the clanking removal of those tin covers, he performed the ceremony of presenting The MacWaugh.

"Ah!" The Deland possessed a voice of wonderful cadences, and her merest monosyllables were triumphs of elocution. "Ever since I heard of you"—she addressed herself to the bewildered Scotch giant—"I have longed to meet and talk with you; and now the moment has come. Would you mind telling me what your name is?" she added, after a long, melting pause.

"It is juist MacWaugh," said he, "and I am glad to have an opportunity of gratifying ye in any way." He stifled his importunate desire to depart, and resigned himself to conversation.

"This wonderful London!" breathed Miss Deland, with her potent witcheries of manner all in evidence. "The home of everybody who is anybody; the birthplace of so many men of genius——"

"Exceptin' Robert Burns——" began The MacWaugh.

"With such colossal surroundings, such an overwhelming background of antiquity," went on the star, "one feels so little and so young. . . ."

"I am sure there is no need," said The MacWaugh laboriously, "for you to be feeling like that at all."

Miss Deland plied the pitiless archery of her eyes.

"Tell me, Mr. Maquaw"—("as though I had been ane o' those screechin', hook-beaked rainbows at the Zoological Gardens," The MacWaugh said subsequently)—"you love our Art? You are devoted to the theatre?" She shook an exquisitely gloved finger. "I will not believe you if you say No. It is in your face."

"In my feckless days," The MacWaugh began to explain, "when I was a wild ne'er-do-weel wi' more money in my pocket than brains in my head, I dissipated much o' my patrimony—I am no' denying—in that way. It was a pleesant way enough; am no' denying that, either. . . . Light company, male and female; player men and player women; dancing and drinking, laughing and swearing, fighting sometimes, making love always, an' doing no wark at all. . . . Toch!" Perhaps the icy stare of Miss Deland's gorgeous orbs, or the scarlet agony of Edgeborn, awakened him to the consciousness that he had blundered, for, he added: "I am not saying, though, that there are no reputable pairsons engaged in the theatrical calling. Mrs. Siddons, I have been given to understand, was a model o' a' the domestic vairtues. And even in our own day there will be one or two—"

Edgeborn seized his opportunity and hustled him out.

Then the preliminaries of the portrait were gone through, the pose determined, and the draperies arranged. Edgeborn found the dapper little anonymous gentleman—who glided out of his corner when the first note of preparation was struck, and was introduced as Mr. Otis Cleverly—an

intolerable obstacle to progress. He hovered round Miss Deland, gave advice and made suggestions, ignoring the artist in a bland, superior way, which set Edgeborn's Scandinavian blood boiling, and made him yearn to break something heavier and harder than a stick of charcoal over Mr. Cleverly's head. He had expected a *tête-à-tête* full of reciprocal subtleties and artistic exquisites. He would have liked to monopolise the attention of the artist who was the rage, for whose glances and words and smiles the great ones of the earth were—unless newspapers told fibs—eagerly scrambling. But the presence of the middleman—this cultured little person with the subtly-tinted necktie, the irreproachable frock-coat, and the wonderfully-cut gray trousers—reduced him to the position of a bad third. He made his first rough charcoal sketch, and the vigour which nerved his touches was prompted by annoyance instead of inspiration.

"A fellow who mixes up Romney and Reynolds, and doesn't know that Botticelli illustrated Dante, or that some of the old Venetian painters used honey instead of oil!" he said afterwards, when Miss Deland and her cavalier had departed, and he was sitting down to the stagnant dishes of the rejected lunch. It grew dark as he lighted the pipe from which he had been divorced all day. A mandoline twangled in the courtyard. Doors opened and shut, and the coming and going of footsteps and the scraping of chairs, with the clack of cheerful voices, told that the inhabitants of North-West Studios were holding their nightly symposium, a revel uncheered by anything stronger than coffee and tobacco.

Edgeborn shrugged his shoulders impatiently and glanced at the charcoal outline on the tall easel under the flaring gaslight, as though to apologise for the noisy inbreak of those commonplace, well-known voices upon

Miss Deland's exclusive meditation. But the sound of his own name made him prick his ears.

"Edgeborn had a new sitter the day," said The Mac-Waugh. "She came in just as I was leaving."

"What is she like?" asked Ellen Angelo.

"She is no' so young as she has been," said The Mac-Waugh, "but she seemed a pleasant, sensible body. Am wondering why a little woman at her time of life should be getting her portrait done—unless, indeed, she has a married son or daughter wanting it. Tooh! it is a poor life—a portrait-painter's. His genius is harnessed to so many kin' o' conveyances—from the gilt coach to the Pickford's van—or the grocer's rattletrap—or the dust-cairt." He scraped his chair back and cleared his throat. "Ay," he said, "there is no doubt. To ennable Art ye must fir-r-st prostitute her—if ye have no' the Bank o' England in your pouch. There is the necessity o' living. Tooh! it is juist remarkable the things ye must endure—only to live. Ye must crawl, like a slug, over miles o' Bristol-board, leaving a black trail o' India-ink behind ye—like Millars an' many more. Or ye must design Christmas cards, wi' bees and butterflies, roses an' lilies, an' naked pink babies in smiling festoons—like Miss Waynflete an' others. Or ye must paint Sir Richard McGowk wi' Lady McGowk, an' Alderman Suet, an' Professor Hodmadodd, an' their wives an' families—like Edgeborn an' his kind. Or ye must—but that's the easiest way o' all—sit an' starve an' wait until deeth comes for ye—like me!"

Edgeborn moved impatiently, and flung his shadow on the illuminated window-blind.

"How late he works to-night!"

He knew the soft voice that had spoken.

"It will be the charcoal sketch he is doing something to. He has some excuse for keeping at the grindstone,"

said The MacWaugh. "Not for mutton chops, but the bread o' life a man may weel wark. There was a time—once—when nothing seemed too diffeecult. Toch ! I went at every gate like a wild bull. It is guid to be young an houful, and to love and be loved. . . . It is getting late; Miss Waynflete has gone in."

"I also in must go," said old Karl, "or I shall have anoder of my influenzas. Dere ! dat was de ten o'glock post. No letters for nobody to-night !"

The postman had gone straight on instead of turning down the narrow tunnel-like passage which led to North-West Studios. Mr. Crow had not sent the cheque. There was no need to tell—yet, thought Edgeborn.

The days went by one after another, and still he had not told, and still old Karl and Ellen Angelo kept counsel. The Deland came, fulfilling her appointments with tolerable punctuality, and the portrait slowly took shape and likeness. On the days when she did not come Edgeborn went out and roamed about, or stayed at home and stared at his handiwork, and dreamed dreams to be realized by-and-by—visions in which, let it be confessed, Avis had no share. And night would come with its familiar voices, and, wrapped in the grandeur of his secret, he would sit alone, when one step would have made him the centre of a circle of cheerful, companionable human beings.

Cleesy, who had built himself a studio in St. John's Wood, and married an ex-model when opulence and fame fell to his lot, dropped in one evening.

"I went," said he, "the other night to the Buskin Theatre, and saw some Americans playing Shakespearian tragedy."

"Oh!" said Edgeborn. "Did you have a stall ?"

"I had a whole row," said Cleesy. "The house was nearly empty. I'm afraid the management is losing money."

The words came like a pailful of cold water upon Edgeborn's glowing secret; but he hid his discomfiture. What did Cleesy know, after all? And if the attendance at the Buskin was falling off, Mr. Dominic Crow was a wealthy man.

Next day came an apologetic telegram from Miss Deland. Edgeborn tried to work upon the draperies of the now nearly finished portrait, but could do nothing, and threw down his palette and brushes in a rage. For hours he paced the studio, tugging at his beard and sucking at a pipe that would not keep alight, until the dusk fell, and the mandoline twangled, and the cheerful voices began to awaken in the courtyard without.

"What is Edgeborn doing with himself all this time?" said Millars. "Nobody has seen him for weeks. Perhaps he is seedy—or down on his luck."

"Or up on his luck," said Ellen Angelo, in a still, small voice that penetrated to the ear of the listening Edgeborn like a bolt of cold steel.

"*Ach ja!* Perhaps he has made his fortune," said old Karl, "und is about to take flide from amongst us on wings of bang-notes. *Py de way, I haf someding to astonish you all. I went to de deadre de odder efening.*"

"Which theatre?" somebody asked.

"De Buskin. It is an American company dat is playing Shagespeare's *Romeo und Chuliet*. *Ach!* de define Shage-speare! How different, how motch infinitely kander he is in de Chairman original!"

"Though our English version is not at all bad," said Ellen Angelo, "considering everything. Well! Did you fall in love with Juliet?"

"She is a gleffer woman," said old Karl, "so far as a ges-dure goes. Und she has a foice like a church organ blaying, in a dundersdorm. But she is not—*ach!* she is not Chuliet, nor will be if she lives anodder forty years."

"When that cheque comes—when the portrait is finished," said Edgeborn, low and savagely, "I will get out of this infernal place—this populous rabbit-warren of mediocrity. I am stultified—stifled amidst these surroundings. I am——"

The postman knocked. Edgeborn tore open an important-looking monogrammed envelope, only to find that a long-suffering colourman had sent in his bill, with a polite request that no further delay might be made in its settlement. And that morning Mrs. Kitt had manifested a disposition to strike. He uttered an impatient groan, and trod the paper under foot, and turned to the canvas whence the face of the actress looked forth. He had dealt tenderly with the lines that time and the constant play of the facial muscles had drawn upon that mobile stage mask. He had enlarged the eyes and made the mouth smaller, and taken the grey threads out of the hair, and freshened the skin, parched and wearied by the constant use of pigments. And in doing this work of restoration he had shown himself to be devoid of true artistic insight, unpossessed of a spark of the divine fire of artistic inspiration. But yet he, the little painter who would never become a great one, looked upon his work and said, both in his heart and to the echoing walls about him, that it was splendid. A man who could paint like that was far too good to be thrown away upon a girl like Avis Waynflete.

Yes, the murder was out. He knew now why he had not told her. He wanted to be free of her; he grudged to share with her the mantle of success that had fallen on him; he cursed himself for that promise he had given to marry her as soon as his first Academy picture should be sold. He did not mean to tell her that he had sold it, even when the cheque came. He meant within himself to give up his studio, go away quietly, and break with her by letter,

and from a distance, as soon as the money—the eagerly desired, much-needed money—came to hand. He would pay her. Yes, he would pay her the many sovereigns he had borrowed from those eager, tender hands. He meant—no one could say he did not mean—to do the honourable thing.

He could not repress a certain feeling of shame at having unmasked himself to himself. He kept his eyes sullenly from the mirror in his chamber, as he made preparations for bed. When he threw himself down he could not rest. His eyes were hot, his head ached, and just at the moment when sleep seemed about to visit his feverish pillow, there was a heavy crash next door, on The MacWaugh's side. An easel or some other weighty article had been violently upset. Then doors slammed, one after another, and heavy footsteps began to pace up and down. More crashes followed, and a hoarse voice broke into song—song which the vocalist accompanied with terrific bangs upon the wall. In a fury of irritation Edgeborn sprang out of bed, and, throwing on a few garments, hurried forth upon a mission of remonstrance.

The MacWaugh's door stood wide open. The gas was flaring in the little entry and the studio beyond. Edgeborn went in. The MacWaugh, in whom the fires of the hardly-attained delirium of intoxication were already dying out, sat in a Windsor chair—one of the few articles of furniture that the joint cravings of his small hunger and his great thirst had left him. He lifted his bloodshot eyes.

“Is that yourself, Crashaw? Man, you have forgotten auld friends for long. But the deid bear no malice, and she is quiet in her grave, though to hear her cry upon you, once, was enough to break a heart of stone. Peetiful—peetiful! puir Ally!”

Edgeborn coughed, and a light of recognition came into the wild eyes. The MacWaugh composed his features.

"Edgeborn! Toch! I was near mistaking ye for a man I used to be companions wi' once. Ye have heard o' Crashaw! He was something o' your type. I was thinking o' Crashaw just as ye came in. What brought ye out? Could ye not get your rest?"

"I should think I couldn't!" said Edgeborn gruffly.

"Then we will mak' a nicht o' it. Unfortunately," said The MacWaugh, "there is no liquor on the premises—or no' juist the kind would be wholesome for a young man like you." He produced a black bottle, empty, and looked at it reflectively.

"What's in the bottle?"

"It recently contained," The MacWaugh conscientiously replied, "a meexture o' rum an' methylated speerit."

"Rum and methylated——!" Edgeborn fell back aghast.

"It is a blend o' my own invention," said The MacWaugh. "Am thinking whether to christen it 'The Drunkard's Refuge' or 'The Inebriate's Forlorn Hope.' Either name would look well upon the labels."

"I wonder you're alive!" said Edgeborn.

"I parteeicipate in your surprise," returned The MacWaugh drily. "But a man has only to hate Life wi' all the strength o' his weary body an' sick soul, to find it stick to him—ay like a burr. Let the face o' the warld change to him, though, and the desire o' continued existence return, and—Toch!—he will be rattling his last breath awa' before the day is done. But back wi' ye to your bed. I will no' enocourage late hours on the part o' a respectable young man like you."

His gesture of dismissal with the great hand that clutched the empty bottle was so threatening that Edgeborn, fore-

going his intended exhortation, hastened to depart. The MacWaugh accompanied him as far as the doorsteps. It was one o'clock, with a faint glimmer coming in the east, and a chilly wind swept the fallen leaves over the gravel with a sound like the dragging of a woman's gown. The MacWaugh held his breath to listen.

"It is an uncanny sound, that," he said hoarsely, to himself. "It is like when Crashaw went away and left her, first; and she would stray up an' down, down an' up, by the hour together. Ay, it is not a cheerful sound!" He glanced across the courtyard to where a light glimmered in the window of the opposite studio.

"More are wakeful here than you an' me. Many a nicht I see that light"—he pointed to the yellow shine. "Strange! the puerility an' selfishness o' human nature. That one sore haint should be a little eased by the knowledge that another is bleeding near it!"

Then his tone changed; an angry glare came into his bloodshot eyes.

"See there where that candle shines," he cried. "Man, Edgeborn, there is a dumb cry going up from under that roof both night and day—the cry o' a creature that has never offended; that is white without an' within like one o' her own lilies; and all she asks o' Him that made her is a sup o' sympathy an' a crumb o' love. I am fair mad wi' Heaven sometimes," said The MacWaugh. "What does it matter whether the thing she wants is worthless or no', so long as she canna' live wi'out it? An' why should He make as much wark about it as though she was crying for a star? There, the licht's out. She heard your voice. Guid-niecht!"

Another week went by, and Miss Deland did not put in an appearance, nor did that oblong slip of gray watered

paper—so ardently longed for and expected, and bearing Mr. Crow's somewhat illegible autograph—gladden Edgeborn's sight. He had avoided the theatre hitherto, out of delicacy, feeling that his appearance might be construed as a reminder of money due; but now he threw delicacy to the winds, and resolved to call upon the manager forthwith. He would first inquire after the health of Miss Deland, and then casually refer to the matter of the money. He dressed himself carefully and went down to the theatre. The outside of the building bore a somewhat dusty and deserted look; the iron gates were locked, and across them, trenchant as the sword of the angelic guardian of a forfeited Paradise, flamed a scarlet legend:

CLOSED.

Yes, the Buskin was closed: the season had come to a premature end. Where, where was Edgeborn's dramatic *Mæcenas*? whither had his gifted sitter flown? There was no echo to answer the artist's despairing appeal, but a dingy stage-doorkeeper looked out from a little rabbit-hutch round the corner, up a shabby entry guarded by a red lamp, and it appeared, upon inquiry, that he had a letter for Mr. Edgeborn.

The letter was a very short one. Mr. Dominic Crow presented compliments and offered regrets. Circumstances over which he had no immediate control compelled the abandonment of his theatrical enterprise at the Buskin, the resignation of the "Swanhild"—a work of art which he felt sure would not long remain unpurchased—and the withdrawal of the commission for the portrait. He acknowledged no claim for work done, as he had not the evidence of his own eyes to assure him whether any had actually been executed; but as a solatium for the (possibly) wounded

feelings of the artist, he had the pleasure to enclose the sum of five pounds.

Five pounds in exchange for all the golden dreams of the last two months ! Edgeborn laughed aloud as he pocketed the money under the red lamp and turned away. He strode home, and when he found himself again in the familiar studio, with all his household deities about him, I will not deny that he shed a few scalding tears. Then he took out his penknife, and opened the sharp little blade he devoted to the service of his well-kept finger-nails, and ripped the unfinished portrait across and across, so that it hung in tatters from the frame. And then he ate of the wrathful Mrs. Kitt's mutton chops—which must, without fail, be paid for upon the morrow—and then, it being dusk, thrust his pipe into his mouth, and strode out to join the others. It seemed as though he had been away upon a journey, and had only just come back, as the circle opened to admit him and closed again, and the familiar voices greeted him. He was popular among them. He was admired, not slighted, among them. He was a rising man in their eyes, not a poor devil of a painter who had had his work thrown back upon his hands. He was conscious that there were worse places to live in than North-West Studios. He began to regain some of his old self-conceit—some of the self-confidence which had been so rudely shaken that afternoon. He only winced a little when he struck a match, and the bright little flame showed him the face of Ellen Angelo, with its keen, questioning, observant eyes. She went to him as he hastily dropped the burning slip of wood and trod the sparks out.

“ I saw the news in the paper. Crow has gone back to America. Did he pay you for the ‘Swanhild,’ or is it left upon your hands ??”

Edgeborn whispered back :

"It is left upon my hands. The portrait, too; all my time wasted! Own that I was right not to tell her—now! I was never sure—I always doubted. That was the reason of my silence."

Ellen grasped his hand and shook it in the darkness.

"And I blamed you. I beg your pardon—with all my heart—for thinking what I thought of you. Look here! I have something in a stocking laid by. You must let me tide you over the worst of things. You will not refuse an old friend?"

He was silent, but not with the silence of dissent.

Another hand sought his in the darkness by-and-by—a small, slight hand, light and soft, like a flower. It slid an envelope between his fingers.

"I have got the money for my picture," whispered Avis. "Fifty pounds; and, oh! it has come in time, because I know—I know what you will not tell me. Dear, do not be proud and refuse me the happiness. What I do is done for myself. Are we not one? Or we shall be—some day."

To Edgeborn's changed mood, as he sat there smoking under the quiet stars, surrounded by love and friendship and appreciation, that day did not seem so far off or so undesirably near the dawning.

"What! Edgeborn here?" said The MacWaugh, joining the group. "Toch! It is juist the return o' the prodigal son."

Edgeborn smiled as he slipped Avis's fatted calf into his pocket.

“LILIUM PECCATORUM”

It arrived by itself in a neatly-labelled green-paper bag on the top of a five-guinea assortment of garden flower-bulbs packed in husks. Nobody was in a position to afford any information about the appearance of the thing when grown. The head-gardener consequently assumed an air of mystery masking an ignorance as profound as our own, potted the bulb in patent cocoanut-fibre, and put it in the greenhouse with the daffodils, on the shelf below the paper-white narcissus-polyanthus.

“*Lilium Peccatorum*,” said Didi, hanging over the pot containing the mystery (Didi is the wife of the head-gardener’s employer). “What an odd name! Why do they stick long, solemn, crack-jaw Latin names on to the poor dear flowers? It must hurt them, I can’t help feeling, when all they want is to grow up and be lovely and sweet. *Lilium Peccatorum*!” She made a face.

“Perhaps it means the Sin-Lily,” suggested the employer of the head-gardener.

“What a funny yellow horn it has begun to send up!” gushed Didi. “I feel frightfully anxious to see it in blossom.”

“Wait until April, then,” said Didi’s better-half.

“I don’t feel as though I could; but, of course, I have got to,” said Didi wistfully.

It did not seem as though her patience was going to be taxed so far. The *Lilium Peccatorum* grew apace, and waxed greater every day. It had a devouring appetite for liquid manure, and an insatiable ambition to grow taller and taller.

In shape it resembled an arum lily, though it was three times as big, and when a long green stalk, with a paler green slipper at one end of it, rose from a fold of brown-gray stem-sheathing, Didi held her breath with anticipation.

"What colour is it going to be, I wonder?" Didi would say twenty times a week. "Not white, because I can see spots and streaks and dapples coming. Oh, how my head aches!"

"You have been spending too much time in the greenhouse," said the owner of it and of Didi, judicially. "I have told Welsh that, for a greenhouse, the temperature is abnormally high, and the coke-bill corresponds. But it is no use talking to that man."

"If you only *talked*, and didn't scold and swear," hinted Didi.

"'Scold and swear'! . . . Is thy servant an Australian parrot that he should do these things?" said Didi's husband.

"You can turn it off with a joke if you like, but you never do come out of the greenhouse in a good temper," declared Didi, obstinately. "I don't believe it agrees with you."

"Possibly not," said Didi's owner. "And that brings us back to my original remark about the temperature of the——"

"Bother the temperature!" screamed Didi, her own shooting many degrees above boiling-point. And she violently hurled a yellow-ticketed Mudie novel to the other end of the sofa, where she had been sitting with one knee tucked under her—a favourite posture of Didi's—knitting a silk necktie in a Conservative shade of blue for the man whom she had sworn to obey. The title of the missile was *The Mirage of Marriage*, by "One Who Has Parched by the Lake of Glittering Dust."

“Really, my dear Didi,” her husband was beginning, when Peter and Paul, the fox-terriers, flew at Dandy, the Skye, and tried to divide him between them.

“Down, you brutes! Let go!” thundered Didi’s proprietor, holding a string of dogs aloft by the simple process of lifting Peter by the tail, who had his teeth fixed in Dandy’s hairy scruff, who held Paul firmly gripped by the loose skin of the shoulder. “One would think they had been spending the morning in the greenhouse too,” he remarked, with more point than delicacy, “they are so confoundedly quarrelsome.”

“You know they follow me everywhere,” said Didi, replacing her knitting in the basket, and sweeping out of the room.

The dogs swept out, too, meeting Timour, the Persian cat, on the threshold. A brief scuffle ensued, several resounding slaps were punctuated by as many shrill yelps, and Timour, swelled out to thrice his bulk, and with a tail like a Spanish broom-bush, rushed like a spitting projectile through the drawing-room, and vanished by an open window.

“I saw the cat watching a rat-hole in the greenhouse to-day,” said Didi’s voice from outside the window. “Probably your coke-bill has upset him.” An acid little laugh followed. Then silence. And Prescott came in to say that the head-gardener would be glad of a moment of his employer’s leisure. Two of the under-gardeners who had been busy all day carrying pots between the retarding house and the greenhouse, had exchanged words, finally blows. And the cook had expressed herself in such terms with regard to a consignment of seakale and parsnips for kitchen use that Mr. Welsh merely wished to drop the following sentence: “Either that spitfire goes, or I do!”

“What the deuce is the matter with everybody? Is

there thunder in the air?" pondered the master of this disturbed household. "Where was the cook when she told you your vegetables were rubbish like yourself and your family? In the kitchen, cooking? Because the effect of a glowing 'Triplex' register, combined with anxiety as to—ah! flavouring and so forth . . . allowances must be made for—"

"Sir," said Mr. Welsh, "the outrage was offered on my own ground, so to speak. I refer to the large upper green'ouse, where we are usually busy at this time of year. To-morrow being Sunday, and the privilege customary in good houses, cook had looked in about a spray of Neapolitan violets to match a new bonnet—"

"Looked in! At the greenhouse? . . . Upon my soul! The devil must be in the place!" ejaculated its owner.

"Sir," said Mr. Welsh, "being a Cymric Free Methodist, I have no acquaintance with the personage named. By the way, it may interest you to know that the *Lilium Peccatorum*, concerning which my lady have expressed a good deal of interest, is in the act of bloom."

"Is it? Very well. I'll go and have a look at it," said my lady's husband. He threw on a cap and stepped out at the glass door of his own pleasant den, into the spring sweetness of the garden. The crocus borders blazed yellow in the afternoon sun, the hepatica and the scillas starred the gold bands with amethyst and turquoise. The thrushes sang, and the black sand of the well-kept paths crunched under his feet with a crisp, pleasant sound. And so to the upper greenhouse, where a surprise awaited him. The great green slipper bud of the *Lilium Peccatorum* had bleached to cream outside, and the great single petal had opened in a magnificent aspiring whorl, showing the interior, darkly red as rich blood, and dappled with orange, white, and black. A black, shining, snake-like pistil rose

from the ovary, towering a foot and higher above the volute, and round the marvellous flower buzzed a distracted bevy of flies, drunken with the intolerable odour, as of carrion, which the lily exhaled.

The owner of the flower, breathing it, sickened. He drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and, covering his mouth and nose, drew near the intolerable splendour. The crown of the pistil he saw, as he craned further, ended in an orifice through which fly after fly crawled and disappeared. None of the eager trespassers ever came back, and the carrion odour grew stronger as the newly-opened flower devoured its first living meal.

That intolerable odour, how it first sickened, then stimulated the sense! How the brain responded and the throbbing heart sent forth gushes of thick red blood into the pulsating arteries, only to receive it back, purified by the narrow channels of the veins! What a mystery Life was! What a still greater mystery, Love! Love for a woman, evil, tigerish, and lovely as the Lily of Sin itself, incarnate passion answering to the primal desire, richest fuel for the most devouring flame. Only one woman like *that* in the world. And Didi's husband had left her for Didi. Why not go back? Take up the crimson thread where it had been dropped and weave it with the web of Life again.... Why not?

He asked himself the question with an intolerable yearning, an irresistible longing to be free, to go back. The hand that had stretched out of the Past to grip his heart and squeeze out the wine of memory from its veins, kept hold; its white fellow beckoned. He felt her breath on him, he saw her eyes, and as he gasped for breath the carrion odour of the Sin Lily seemed changed to indescribable sweetness.

He reeled away from it with his hand before his eyes,

with the settled determination that, in spite of oaths made before heaven and to a woman who counted nothing now, he would go back to that other without delay. He could get to Victoria Station in time for the last Dover Express, he could cross by the night boat, be in Paris by five o'clock, next morning. He could tell his man to pack his bag, he would wire from Paris to his solicitors. Didi should have her way made plain for the—for the divorce.

And then he heard her voice and another's at the greenhouse door. He drew back instinctively under a high shelf, and a dainty, pink-blossomed, luxuriantly-growing begonia drooping from above made a screen before him. He heard Didi's trilling, silvery little laugh, a manly guffaw responded, and the reflection of a cavalry moustache was caught in a pane of the opening door as it swung back against the drooping pink trails of the begonia.

“Oh—h ! what an awful smell !” shrieked Didi.

“Where does it come from ?” asked the cavalry moustache. It belonged to a previously-rejected suitor of Didi's, who owned a country place and had motored over to call. “Has the gardener been usin' 'Rough on Rats'? Ought to try the new virus. Never have myself, but they say——”

Didi did not hear; her handkerchief was over her little nose. She fixed her eyes admiringly upon the panther-like, evil beauty of the Sin Lily, and gasped, partly from admiration of the flower, partly in disgust at its odour. “Isd't the thig spleddid ?” she asked, through the handkerchief. “Rodald bought it with sobe Dutch bulbs—ad dobody kdows adythig about it. Do look ad the flies, buzzing about it—poor things !—ad gettig eaten up.”

The face that wore the cavalry moustache had become livid, the brown eyes burned with a sombre red light. “Just as men buzz about some women and get swallowed

before the eyes of the others who're waiting to come on. Do you know, Didi . . . I may call you Didi still, I suppose ?"

"Goodness, why not ?" asked Didi, removing the hand-kerchief.

"Do you know, I've seen a woman exactly like that big red lily. Quite as fascinating, quite as poisonous. I'm ready to bet the thing's poisonous, though I don't know, you know. Saw her in Paris, three or four years ago, and had just strength of mind to run for my life."

"Why ?" lisped Didi. Her blue eyes shone like sapphires, and her cheeks were stained geranium red. Her black hair clung in silky tendrils to the delicate temples; there was a silver comb of Spanish work in the topmost coil, with dull uncut rubies winking in it. And she wore a creamy-hued gown of clinging cashmere under her sable cloak. "Why did you run for your life ?"

"Because I had the courage to act like an honourable man," came the rough answer. Then: "I haven't the courage now !" cried Didi's old lover, and seized her hand, in a strenuous, eager grip, and kissed them with hot devouring lips. "Oh ! Didi ! I love you, ten thousand times more idiotically than ever !" he cried. "Are you going to play the married prude, and tell me to go away ?"

"No !" said Didi, and the word fell like a hammer-stroke on the heart of the listener, who had, you will remember, so fully made up his mind to cross over to Paris by the night's mail. Something whizzed in his right temple, like a clock running down. He moved slightly, in his pink-blossomed, perfumed hiding-place, and shut his eyes to hide what he feared to see.

When he opened them Didi was gone. The other man stood looking at the Sin Lily with bloodshot eyes. And the

carrión odour was no longer perceptible, and whiffs of heavy, silencing sweetness came to the nostrils of Didi's husband and Didi's lover.

“I'm a d——d blackguard, I suppose, but I mean to go on being one,” said the man with the cavalry moustache. “My cosmos is all Ego—et Illa. And I'll take her away, whenever I can get her to go, and face the music, though,” an ugly smile curved the heavy moustache, “there's an old proverb about stolen kisses. . . . Gad ! how sweet that crimson lily smells. And I thought it stank like troops' quarters on a South African transport with the ports all shut and the hatches battened down. Halloo ! Somebody coming ! She ? How like a daughter of Eve ! No ! . . . they're servants. If they'd heard me talking out loud to myself like a man in a rotten play, they'd have said I was off my chump. Well, I *am !*”

The door opened and—

“Beg pardon, sir ! No idea you were still here,” said the voice of the head-gardener. “I thought I saw you leave with my lady a minute ago.”

“Just going, thanks. Only stopped to look at the new lily,” said the voice of Didi's old friend. And as his long legs carried him away and out of the story, the respectable Mr. Welsh ushered into the greenhouse Didi's maid.

“Don't mention it, Miss Todds,” said the civil Mr. Welsh, “always glad to oblige any member of the house staff, as I hope you're aware. This is the new flower you're desirous of seeing, and if you don't object to the hodour, which is a bit off at the first whiff, a handsomer bloom you couldn't wish to see.”

“My, but don't it smell chronic !” cried Todds, curiously sniffing the fœtid exhalations of the magnificent flower.

“It is not so sweet as the breath of a Halderney cow, or of a pretty young woman, which is next best,” said the

respectable Mr. Welsh, drawing close to the undeniably attractive Todds.

"The idea ! Puttin' the cow first—I do call that polite !" giggled Todds.

"There certainly are cows *and* cows," said Mr. Welsh, and surely his opaque little black eyes twinkled outrageously. Surely his respectable tweed sleeve, with the darn that Mrs. Welsh had sat up late to fine-draw, had no right to encircle thus boldly the waist of my lady's maid. But Miss Todds was not angry. On the contrary, she giggled again.

"Naughty !" she said, with a provocative slap on the back of the intrusive hand.

"Miss Todds, I love you !" burst from the respectable Mr. Welsh.

"And you a married man !" gurgled Miss Todds, her curls and coils and waves infringing upon the married man's shoulder.

"Love laughs at laws," said Mr. Welsh, with great originality. "If you don't believe me—ask the cook. Married to a butler, in place not a mile away, old enough to know better, yet what do she do ? Makes me a declaration of unbridled passion only this very morning in this very place—on pretence of seeing me about vegetables for the 'ouse, and if Mrs. Welsh knew, she'd have her eyes out."

"And suppose Mrs. Welsh saw you now ?" was the pertinent question of the fair embraced. "What do you suppose she'd do to you ?"

The reply of Mr. Welsh was a double-barrelled chirp.

"Lor ! you bold-faced man, you !" exclaimed Miss Todds. "And you a stric' Methodist ! I'm ashamed of you !"

In what terms the enamoured head-gardener would have replied can only be conjectured, as his employer at the

psychological moment stepped from behind the screen of the begonia. Miss Todds shrieked and vanished. Welsh, petrified by sudden consternation into the mere image of a head-gardener in the act of touching his cap, remained awaiting judgment.

"And what are you going to say for yourself? It strikes me that you will have some trouble to explain what I have seen just now?" demanded his employer cruelly.

"Sir," began Mr. Welsh, "we are all mortal, frail beings, and equally liable to be overtaken by temptation. And"—he wiped his forehead—"temptation seems to be in the air just now."

"Just so. Take up that pot there, with the *Lilium Peccatorum* in it; carry it to the forcing-house stoking-pit and burn it in the furnace—bulb and all. And if I should call you back and tell you not to carry out the order"—the speaker bit his lips and clenched his hands as though the words cost an effort—"don't obey me. Do you hear?"

"I do, sir," said the relieved Mr. Welsh. He took up the Sin Lily and went out, the scarlet, black, and tawny banner of the uncanny flower flaunting high above the level of his head.

"The thing is done?" asked he who had commanded it a few moments later. "You have burned the lily—every scrap of it?"

"Every bit, sir," said Mr. Welsh, whose look was still dazed. "And if you'll believe me, in the final shrivel, if I may so put it, the flower give a groan."

"Go home to your wife," said Didi's husband, "and don't let what I saw just now occur again."

"It shall not, sir," said Mr. Welsh positively. "The irregularity must have been the outcome of a momentary rush of blood to the brain. Looking back upon it with a calmer mind, I can't comprehend how it happened."

“I can,” muttered his employer, “or that *Lilium Peccatorum* has been named for nothing. Phew! what an escape!”

With his own brain now cool and his own impulses in a strictly regulated condition, he passed on to the house. The gardeners who had quarrelled in the morning were peaceably exchanging tobacco-boxes. Didi and the dogs met him a little farther on. All four looked humble and apologetic.

“Has Emiston gone?” asked Didi’s husband, referring to the owner of the cavalry moustache.

“At least an hour ago,” said Didi, shrugging her slim shoulders. Wheels were heard on the drive, and directly afterwards a servant brought Didi a note written in haste by the owner of the cavalry moustache, and sent over *per* dog-cart and groom.

“Forgive me for being such an idiot. Can’t imagine how I came to forget myself so thoroughly. Am leaving for Paris to-night.—E.” she read aloud.

“So he made an idiot of himself, did he?” asked Didi’s better-half.

“In the greenhouse,” admitted Didi, “and I told him ‘No!’ he needn’t go away, but I suppose he thinks it’s best. By-and-by he will come back and be sensible and marry Vicky Newingly.”

“If I had gone away, as I fully meant to do, while the spell of that infernal flower was upon me, should I have come back and been sensible?” pondered Didi’s husband. And he did not ponder aloud—and it was just as well.

THE MAYNARDS' DANCE

THE eldest Miss Maynard, Lulu, was one of the admitted and acknowledged belles of Shipsea ; the second, Carrie, was of a piquant plainness, and enjoyed even greater popularity than Lulu the lovely, for was she not the best skater, the best tennis and croquet player, the best amateur *comédienne* ? and pre-eminently the best partner the keenest of dancing men—there were dancing men in those days—could desire ? Queen of the ball, empress of the “afternoon,” high-priestess of the “hop” was the youngest Miss Maynard, and her programme-card was always full at least a week before the event. From her tiny arched instep to the topmost wave of her neat little head, which never became dishevelled in the maddest after-supper extra, the youngest Miss Maynard was a devotee of the valse, and absolute mistress of all its forms, varieties, shades and technicalities. Life for her was a *trois temps* well or ill performed, long, short, or so-so. The “Boston dip,” the “Newport slide,” the wriggle that hailed from Ryde, the long easy lollop that might be traced to Eastbourne, the bound that belonged to Brighton—Carrie Maynard had them all at her finger-ends, or toe-tips, should we say, for correctness ? Her step was ever the newest and most fashionable, if her dresses were not ; and the cult of Terpsichore was truly a religion with her as with the ancients. No bayadère was ever possessed with a more rhythmic frenzy ; no feminine dancing dervish ever spun with more exalted rapture—whether feminine dancing dervishes do exist I am hardly assured. She accepted partners not on

the strength of their good looks, their banking accounts, or their tailor's make, but on the quality of their paces, and would desert a man in the middle of a round if he failed to acquit himself with distinction.

"But it's my valse, you know—my valse ! You don't say you're going to turn me up and go back to your mother, or finish it with another beggar ?" a discomfited partner of Carrie's was once heard to protest, after an unsatisfactory turn or two upon a perfect floor. "Such bad form," he added feebly, twisting an infant moustache. "If our steps don't altogether suit, let's sit out. I rather like sitting out."

"I don't come to balls to sit out; I come to dance," the second Miss Maynard was heard to reply, with infinite hauteur. "And," she added, as the celebrated band of the "Green Tartans" swung into a slow, dreamy movement of *Waldteufel*, and the multi-coloured crowd of couples spun, reversed, glided in widening and contracting circles under the great glowing chandeliers of one of the biggest ball-rooms in Great Britain, "I have been deceived in you; you can only flounder." A sob broke from her; she bit the edge of a handkerchief that was not edged with real lace. "Yet you wear the uniform of a dancing regiment. Captain Murdeshaw of yours told me distinctly you were one of their show men.... I shall never, never forgive him.... Go home, Lord Baggeley, go home to your quarters; and if you ever pray, pray to be forgiven ! But, before you go, look at this !"

And with flashing eyes and heaving bosom, Carrie Maynard turned from the discomfited young gentleman, took the arm of Joran, Second Navigating Lieutenant of H.M.S. *Blunderer*, who had been hovering hungrily in the immediate vicinity, and melted into the whirl. A clear space opened about the couple, dancing men and women held breath and arrested motion to see the champions

perform, for Joran was a Man who Could. Lightly as the swallow skims over the shining surface of a quiet pool, Carrie and her partner darted over the polished surface of the floor, and their entwined reflections, upside down, blue and gold for Joran, white and daffodil-yellow for Carrie, followed their flying feet in a blurr of mingled colours. Applause broke out and grew; Baggeley, whose blood was generous, joined in.

When the valse was over, he went to Carrie and apologised manfully, and was led to a distant corner, chalked upon the soles of his pumps by Joran, and given his first lesson in the art of valsing by Carrie, as valsing is understood in Shipsea. He proved an apt apprentice, one is glad to record, and was out of his articles and free of Miss Maynard's programme before the season expired.

But she had a gift of instruction, and taught for the love of teaching. A holy enthusiasm glowed in her for the reclamation and conversion of those hapless heathen who could not dance, or who executed strange gyrations under the impression that they could. The little drawing-room of Ghoorka Villa—a forty-pound stucco residence at the unfashionable end of Shipsea, rented by Mamma Maynard—was usually in a state of clearance; its Tottenham Court Road Bokhara carpets rolled up, and its tables, sofas, and so forth set back against the walls, for the convenience of neophytes, generally male and military, who wanted to learn the Newest Step. The household dogs would retreat into secure corners, and the cat would convey her kittens to the summit of the bookcase, when a visitor's knock rat-tatted at the front-door. The piano had never learned to play anything but valse, the canary twittered in *trois temps*, and Mrs. Maynard, making the pudding for dinner in the half kitchen, half sitting-room below, stirred milk and eggs of the cooking brand to the same measure. She

was a cheery, widowed soul, and hospitable to the verge of mania. I believe the Maynard Dance was given at her suggestion.

Cards were issued for this festivity at the frayed under-edge of the Shipsea season. The entire dancing population of the south-coast garrison town were bidden to come and revolve. That Ghoorka Villa was a dwelling utterly inadequate in size to the accommodation it was required to afford was a reflection which never for an instant, I believe, occurred to the joyous widow and her offspring. The under-sized drawing-room, furnished with tottery bamboo, photographs, penny fans, and art draperies, and the shabby little Early Victorian sitting-room behind it, were thrown into one by the simple process of opening the folding doors that separated them, and the floors, uncarpeted by the handy-man of errands and the domestic slave, were subjected to a process of beeswaxing which left the boards, if sticky in some places, satisfactorily slippery in others.

"As for rout-seats and benches and that kind of thing," said Mrs. Maynard, with a toss of her lively little grizzled head, "let those hire them from the assembly rooms that care to go to the expense. Nobody is coming to our dance who isn't coming to dance, and if people get tired, or want to sit out and flirt, let them do it on the stairs."

"They're dark enough, especially the basement flight, even for Ruby Costello," remarked Lulu Maynard, with a wicked gleam in her astonishing eyes.

"And we'll have 'em scrubbed thoroughly, pet—so we will!" said the brisk widow. "Black-beetles don't care to venture where there's company."

"And if they should, Bobby Carnegie will be at hand," said Carrie Maynard, referring to a Naval College man blushfully notorious for pedal developments, "to march down in his No. 14's and slay."

The green-painted gate of the little front-garden clicked back at that instant to admit no less a personage than Bobby referred to, who had bicycled up from the Naval College to lend a hand. He was always ready to lend a hand, excellent Bobby ! and run himself off his superlatively-sized feet for the very people who chaffed them most. He brought a coil of white cotton side-rope and the necessary tackle for rigging and awning, which was spread over the little grass-plat with the assistance of the handy-man, a battered old seaman of the obsolete oak-and-hemp type, with an immovable eye, fixed, according to its owner, by the paralysing sight of the first British broadside ironclad, the *Warrior*, steaming into Sevastopol Harbour in 1861.

If only it did not rain ! The *Blunderer's* turret-gun practice—these were early days, before the invention of the barbette—the *Blunderer's* gun practice usually brought a blessing of this kind from the astonished skies. Lulu Maynard peeping from the window of the cockloft accorded to the little general servant as a bedroom, saw the sharp-nosed black outline of the great battleship cutting the calm blue glistening plain of the Solent as she hurried on her way to the gunnery range, and shook a small white fist threateningly in her direction. Whether this demonstration was effectual I do not know. Still, gun-practice despite, the weather held up. And then, in the pale moth-haunted dusk of a September evening, the Chinese lanterns were lighted by Bobby—whose colossal feet were now encased in the smartest of open-worked socks and the shiniest of patent pumps, made by contract, his friends unkindly said, the material of one bootmaker not being equal to the demand—and the ball-room and the marquee were revealed in all the magnificence of preparation.

“A cab !” Mrs. Maynard, mixing claret cup of the

“Kangaroo” brand in a wash-hand basin, dropped the ladle and sped, rustling in well-preserved black silk, to the hostess’s vantage-ground, as the “Hairy Caterpillar” and her escort, an aunt of faded appearance, and a very young Marine Artilleryman who happened to be the latest victim, alighted at the green gate, too narrow to admit any vehicle larger than a perambulator. Close upon their heels came the Hermit girls and the General, their papa; a fine, military figure still, if purple as to the nose and tremulous as to the hands, fiercely moustached, beautifully dyed, and wearing a mysterious green-ribboned decoration on his left lapel. A shower of naval lieutenants, the *fine fleur* of the dancing contingent of the Fleet, began to fall, and the quiet street began to block with vehicles, cabs, T’carts, brakes, mail-phaetons, as Westney Barracks, Shoredge, Gaybridge, and other military depôts gave up their pride. More girls, chaperoned and otherwise—the otherwise prevailing, there being no room to spare for people who did not trip the light fantastic—more men, more girls, and more men; a Babel of gay voices, a crush of black coats and gilt epaulets, bare shoulders and light draperies on the narrow gravel path, in the miniature marquee, in the little squeezy hall of Ghoorka Villa, and the ball-room filling steadily until the thin young man who played the violin and the stout young lady who played the piano gasped for air, encircled by a solid mass of expectant dancers reaching from wall to wall. Than the valse, the regnant, imperial, tyrannical, all-absorbing valse; no other dance figured on the programme; the polka, the galop, the lancers, the quadrille, the cotillon found no favour in the eyes of the enthusiasts gathered beneath the roof of Ghoorka Villa.

“*Mine*,” murmured Sanfron, the dancing star of the Green Tartans, as the strains of a seductive Teutonic

measure opened the ball, and he slipped the hand of Carrie Maynard under his black coat-sleeve.

"They've begun!" gasped Mrs. Maynard, buried under a heap of fresh arrivals. "It's not too early," continued the little lady faintly, as her cap, swept from her head in a surge of the crowd, vanished, attached to the rearward buttons of a gallant hussar. "I think we're all here!"

"Heaven grant it!" murmured Debadie, of the Royal Mac Turks, as the walls of Ghoorka Villa swayed and the flooring shuddered under the tremendous strain of the widow's hospitality.

"Get my handkerchief out of my cuff for me, will you, old man?" gasped Beauty Crichton, whose pale brow was bedewed with unusual perspiration. "I'm helpless in this dashed jam!"

"Black Hole of Calcutta a fool to it!" snorted a purple-nosed old General Hermit, who usually lived a bachelor life at the club, but had consented to father two of his numerous feminine olive-branches on this occasion. "Mrs. Maynard, my dear lady, this is positively charmin'! But for my age and weight I'd beg you to open the ball. . . . Upon my word, dear lady, your friends have rallied round you with a vengeance. . . . Ugh! damn! Beg pardon! Somebody treading on my toe."

"This is a community of toes, General," said Debadie. "All distinctions merged in— Hallo! What on earth is coming now?"

"It's dear Mrs. St. Marion in her bath-chair!" panted Mrs. Maynard, as the pack became denser, and the parallelogram of Chinese-lantern-lit garden revealed by the open hall-door was blotted out by the hood of the conveyance, within which, white and diaphanous and lovely in filmy laces, with jessamine and tuberoses in her golden hair and at her breast, sat the lovely doomed creature, whose real

story the General had confided to Debadie at the club a few days previously. "We asked her to come in and look on, poor dear thing! thinking it would amuse her."

"Amuse the devil!" grunted the General, who still reaped anguish from his trodden corn.

The sweet, plaintive voice of the invalid penetrated through the turmoil to Mrs. Maynard's ear, and to another.

"You all seem so happy. Don't let me be a blight. There is a tent in the garden—the night is almost too warm—I think I will take shelter there. Wheel me out, Dawkins. . . . No, no, Captain Debadie, you must not come. I cannot accept such a sacrifice. . . . It is too kind of you—to—"

"No sacrifice. A privilege," Debadie whispered, helping the man out of livery down the doorsteps with the bath-chair. He had newly gorged the bait, and the hook had not pricked once as yet. "But, oh! Kathleen, for Heaven's sake, tell me if you feel a chill!"

"Gone into the garden with Mrs. St. Marion!" cried the second Miss Guernsey. "Captain Debadie! . . . Why, he was engaged to dance this with me." A high note of indignation and a quiver as of tears mingled in her accents.

"He's dancing to another choone, Laura darlin'!" whispered a Hibernian voice close to Miss Guernsey's ear, as the bath-chair, propelled by Dawkins and guarded by Debadie's tall figure, rolled down the moonlit gravel path. "It's an ill wind blows nobody good, and I'm dying for a spin with you, *cushla machree!*"

And the red-headed Lieutenant commanding the torpedo-boat *Nipper* made captive of the not unwilling hand of Miss Guernsey, and, with a dogged determination creditable to the Service, proceeded to ram his way into the apartment devoted to the dance. There was plenty of noise; a light fog of dust floated over the heads of crowded talkers; the

violin and piano discoursed the most alluring of valses in excellent rhythm. But nobody was dancing. The reason of this inertia was soon apparent to the Irishman. Crimson and dewy-browed he made his way to the side of the perplexed Miss Maynard, crying, "We're packed like herrings in a barrel, Miss Carrie; and that's the truth. No room! Not as much as Micky would you taste it, until half of us sheer out. Turns about, that'll be the way of it. One section of us can dance in the garden while the rest shake themselves in here; and if the garden isn't big enough, there's the landings and the roof! Once set the ball rolling, that's the thing!"

And at a push from the shoulders of the ready-witted Hibernian, the ball did begin to roll. The Maynards' dance began in earnest, and the cocks had crowed the sun well up the eastern sky before that festivity came to an end. They danced in the overflowing ball-room, in the hall, and on the gravel path. They danced on the grass-plat under the awning, and they danced in the road. They danced in the basement kitchen sitting-room, where the Australian claret cup and the sandwiches had been laid out. They danced in the bedrooms. . . . I should not like to make oath to the effect that they did not dance on the roof. And the house entered into the joke of the thing and danced too. The tenant of the adjoining villa called about 1 a.m. to report that his joists were cracking; the infection caught him, and he stopped to dance. His family subsequently looked in to fetch him; I believe they also were absorbed in the maddening whirl. At two-ten all the soot in the parlour chimney came down into the grate; nobody heeded that, everybody went on dancing. At three o'clock, all the refreshments laid out in the basement having fortunately reached their appointed destination, the floor of the ball-room above gave way at the bow-window

end, joists cracked, plaster fell. . . . The General, owner of the purple nose previously referred to, Major Guernsey and a half-dozen of old campaigners engaged in the recital of ancient stories and the consumption of British brandy and water, enjoyed the full advantage of the solid shower, but save a few scratches, escaped by the door unhurt, charging up the kitchen staircase, crowded with spooning couples, "like wild buffalo bulls," as Miss Costello said.

"The landlord himself suspected that the floor was shaky," said the optimistic mistress of Ghoorka Villa, "and now he knows he was right. Though neither Lulu, Carrie, or myself ever dreamed of its giving way, and Mr. Carnegie jumped on it several times to test it, and——"

Bobby blushed red as the sun at that instant emerging from his sea-bath. There was an uncontrollable titter. The torpedo-boat lieutenant said something about a last straw, and the titter grew into a roar. Then hats, opera-cloaks, and wraps were sought for, unearthed from bedrooms, cupboards, nooks under stairs, all sorts of queer corners, identified with the greatest possible difficulty, and put on. The garden of Ghoorka Villa presented, during this closing ceremony, the oddest of spectacles. Goloshes and hoods hung like strange fruit upon the laurel-bushes; crush-hats and overcoats bestrewed the glass-plat; Miss Costello, known as "The Bursting Bud," sitting on an upturned flower-pot, raked the last victim effectively with her glance and convinced him of the Andalusian properties of her instep, as she permitted him to change her shoes. . . . Lulu Maynard solicitously arranged a wrap round the neck of Beauty Crichton, who inclined his pale classical profile at a becoming angle, all unconscious of the smuts upon his nose; and the Hairy Caterpillar, with the shy abandonment of first love, permitted herself to be kissed by Sanfron of the Green Tartans in the shelter of an American aloe about

three feet high. A good many people had got engaged at the Maynards' dance, and were behaving accordingly. . . . Even Bobby, faithful Bobby Carnegie, of the large heart and the larger feet, had elicited an admission from Carrie Maynard that if he—Bobby, to wit—had been better off, and better looking, with bigger prospects and smaller feet, she—Carrie—might have come one day to love him !

As for Mrs. St. Marion and her bath-chair, they had gone home to Holland Parade hours and hours before, escorted by the infatuated Debadie. Hatless, cool, with the damp of the salt morning breeze in his crisp waves of hair, and with the pale gray gossamer threads of the early caterpillar straying over the black of his accurate evening attire, he strolled in at the little green garden gate at Ghoorka Villa at this juncture.

“Saw her home ? . . . Of course, of course !” chuckled the purple-nosed General malignantly. “That’s not a complexion to stand the damp, my dear sir. Too hectic, I mean,” as Debadie glared. “About twelve, and it’s four o’clock now. You went in and shared the invalid’s supper. Eh, what ? She’s victimised many in her time—I was one of ‘em—and if I know anything at all—you’ll be the next. Oh, bless her, bless her !”

It will be understood that the General did not really bless Mrs. St. Marion.

“Come, girls, it’s time you were starting home. Your mother will be getting anxious. Hey, cab there, cab !” And as the shabby cab rattled up to the green gate, the General collected the younger of his feminine olive-branches and looked about for the eldest. “Where has Rosabel got to ? What has she done with herself ? Not lost again ! Don’t tell me ! in a house the size of a liver-pill box. . . . She’s always getting lost. . . . At the Westney Ball, at the Naval College, at the dance on board the *Splendiferous*,

at the Assembly Rooms five-shilling hop. Oh, bless her, bless her!" growled the General.

"Here she is!" cried Mrs. Maynard, nodding and waving the family tin coffee-pot, from which she was dispensing a steaming stirrup-cup to all who had "far to go." "Rosabel, love, the General has been calling for you——"

"I was sitting out with Major Vialin," Rosabel explained, appearing from some unlocated flirtation nook in company with the gallant warrior named. "He was giving me some idea of his reading *Othello*. . . . So interesting——"

"Where? In the stoke-hole, by the cut of both their jibs," burst out the irrepressible commander of the torpedo-boat; and in truth, judging by the cobwebs which clung to them and the Ethiopian smudges which adorned the major's shirt-front, and his partner's white gown, the suspicion might not have been unfounded.

"Dashed confounded old married man, too!" snarled General Hermit, his purple nose paling to heliotrope in the chill of the morning breeze. He assisted his daughters into the cab with forced politeness, banged the door, and thrust in his face for a last farewell before pulling up the crazy window. "You blessed idiot!" he gnashed.

"Don't, papa!" pleaded the younger olive-branch, as Rosabel mingled tears with the anonymous smuts which darkened her exquisite complexion.

"Don't, papa!" And you. . . . What have you done in the way of improving your prospects and assisting your family?" the General demanded.

The younger Miss Hermit possessed more grit than her sister. She faced the author of her being courageously.

"I am engaged to Mr. Sanderson, as I have been for the last three years, and as I suppose I shall be for the next thirteen." Now Sanderson was a junior lieutenant in the Blue Marines and the General's *bête noire*. "His

people won't make him an allowance, because they don't care about his marrying your daughter. And they're right. If I were Johnny's mother, I should think twice before I gave my consent to his mixing himself up with us. . . . We're shady," said the second Miss Hermit.

The General's face was diabolical. He gnashed his teeth and sputtered foam. "'We—we're shady.' . . . I suppose you mean me. . . . Do you, bless you? do you, you undutiful, impudent, brazen-faced——" He became voiceless.

"Yes, I do mean you," said his younger daughter calmly. "Tell the man to drive home. . . . I suppose you will breakfast at the Club, as usual?"

And the stale-smelling, rattling cab moved on.

THE INFAMY OF THE MACWAUGH

PART I.

“WERE we inhabitants o’ ane or tither o’ the frigid zones,” remarked The MacWaugh, “a May morn-ing o’ this pre-cise temperature nicht afford a walcome opportunity for an *al fresco* breakfast out o’ doors. But the victuals would be nitrogenous an’ warmth imparr-ting (such as walrus blubber an’ blood soup), an’ you an’ me, Rathburn, man, would be appropriately attired in the wrappings that came round the meat. Which——”

The MacWaugh paused to suck hard at an old and noisome clay, and thrust his huge hands as far as they would go into the baggy pockets of a frayed tweed shooting-jacket. And Rathburn, arranging with dexterous touches two blue cups and saucers, with plates, knives, and forks, a loaf of bread in a platter of old Majolica, and a handful of early roses in a Salviati glass, upon a neatly-covered little table set outside the front-door upon the asphalte sidewalk that ran about the quadrangle of North-West Studios, looked up and showed his white teeth in a pleasant smile.

“Toch ! If you’re thinking,” continued The MacWaugh, “I am ignorant that the real reason o’ your adorr-ning yourself in a silk shirt an’ a velvet coat, an’ the secret o’ your appetite for fresh air wi’ your breakfast-bacon, is that a new tenant o’ the unfeeling sex has entered into posses-sion of Number Nine”—he waved his pipe at the brass number on the opposite door—“and that you’re seeking to gie her an example o’ the Life Beautiful, an’ the oppor-tunity o’ judging for herself whether all young men that

pick up an uncerr-tain leevin' by dirr-tying millboard or smudging canvas are equally plain—you're wrang ! I am conscious o' that, an' sensible to my ain value in the picture as a balancing contrast to yoursel'. So was Socrates when he walked arm in arm with Alcibiades down the sweet shady side o' the Athenian Piccadilly. Ay, place me whaur she will be getting the full worth of me in case she keeks between the Tottenham Court Road Bokhara carpets she has nailed ower the lower pairt o' her window. Bathed in atmosphere, my Cyclopean arr-chitecture gilded by the sunlight, I am picturesque if no' beautiful. Toch ! Mrs. Kitt is lang in coming wi' the morr-ning snack. An' that reminds me, Rathburn—she struck last nicht."

"Struck ! Cut off supplies !" gasped Rathburn, turning as salmon-pink as the silk shirt referred to by The Mac-Waugh.

"Ay. There is a matter of aucht pounds owing to the woman for our breakfasts, lunches, and oddments," said The MacWaugh soberly, "an' would you have her cast her Finnan haddies on the waters for ever, no' to mention her chops an' sausages ? It is not to be expected, Rathburn, man !"

"But hang it, Mac !" cried Rathburn, "why didn't you tell me ?"

"There I am to blame," said The MacWaugh, "but you ken the kind o' memory I have. It is no' to be expected"—he spoke with great enjoyment, folding his massive arms upon a deep and capacious chest as he sucked vigorously at the short black clay—"it is no' to be expected that a man that has wasted the morning an' heyday o' life in riot an' dissipation—like mysel'—a physical and moral wreck, floating on the turgid sea of failure an' covered wi' the weeds and barnacles o' experience, would ——" His gray eye brightened, and his rugged features

softened into a boyish smile. "Toch!" he said, "if my sicht were no' failing wi' my other faculties, I would say—here comes Mrs. Kitt wi' the breakfast, after all!"

The vision of The MacWaugh had not deceived him. Mrs. Kitt, wife of the porter of North-West Studios, purveyor of creature-comforts, dispenser of credit, and arbitress of Fate on this particular morning, had emerged from the lodge side-door bearing a tray. This poised aloft, she bore down upon the anticipative couple, deposited her burden upon the table with a bang which set teacups and tin covers dancing, and, wheeling round, retreated to her kitchen-fastness without a spoken word.

"The woman has a heart," said The MacWaugh, beaming above the steam of Mrs. Kitt's coffee-pot. "And if every picture-dealer between this an' the Waterloo Road had no' had a surfeit of Thames scenery, she should have her aucht pounds. Let us titillate our appetites wi' a moment's suspense." He gently advanced his nose to the edge of the tin cover of the principal dish. "My sense o' smell, weakened by the wild an' reckless excesses of a life o' debauchery," he sniffed so strongly that the tin cover jumped, "my sense o' smell is no' reliable. It micht be fried plaice,—ham an' eggs are amang the possibilities—grilled kidneys the fevered imagination micht suggest. But for whatever is here may we be properr-ly thankfu'! Take off the cover, Rathburn, man."

And Rathburn obeyed, revealing in the midst of an oasis of cheap willow-pattern crockery a red account-book.

The young man swore, grinding his white teeth and twisting his neat moustache. The MacWaugh, whose pachydermatous sense of humour was only penetrable by witticisms of the steel-nosed explosive kind, roared with Homeric laughter.

"Toch!" he panted, mopping his tearful eyes with a

frayed tweed cuff, "that has done me a hantle o' guid. Oh, man ! if ye had seen your ain face. . . . Huts ! dinna swear at the woman—she is in her richts—an' what apter illustration o' the Life Beautiful could be offered to the obserr-vation o' the new young lady tenant o' Number Nine than the sicht of twa pure-souled, high-minded young men, seated under the morr-ning sky, drawing in deep draughts o' Nature (I am some fearing these courtyard gully-drains will be needing attention), and breaking their fast æsthetically on coffee and roses ? Pass me the loaf !"

But the door of Number Nine had opened, and the new tenant of the studio appeared; a slender figure, relieved against the background of gray-green Japanese matting with which Ladislas Smith, the popular designer of impressionistic posters (who had taken wing for Holland Gate a few days previously), had covered the walls. She wavered an instant, and then boldly crossed the courtyard, the slight wind ruffling her hair and playing with the folds of her dress, which was of rough white woollen. Her cheeks, ordinarily pale, one might have guessed, were pink with shyness, her blue eyes were anxiously kind, and in her white forehead was a little nervous pucker. As she crossed the central grass-plat of the gravelled courtyard, with a light, irresolute movement suggestive of a vagrant leaf blown onwards by the fitful puffy breeze, rather than the gait of a human body impelled by a human will, The Mac-Waugh said, pausing with the bread-knife suspended in mid-air :

" Do ye mind Artemidora, the nymph Landor's Aspasia compared to a white blossom on the river, swaying amang the reeds ? Ye do not ? Weel, yon slim creature might weel be she—but that I canna call to mind Artemidora ever having been mentioned in connection wi' a cauld ham."

" She has got a ham there, upon my word !" said Rathburn.

"Now she is bowing across the porr-cine burr-den to Karl Voss, out for a morn-ning walk in his cap an' goloshes. Toch ! it a' but overbalanced her !" went on The MacWaugh. "There was a chance missed for an introduction. Had Artemidora dropped her ham, ane o' us micht have picked up the dish, while the other rescued the ham. Toch ! she is coming here !"

"I—I beg your pardon !"

The MacWaugh rose, a human tower draped in ancient tweeds, and despoiled himself of the pipe which had not hitherto interfered with the mastication of his crust of bread and butter. Rathburn snatched off his cap and sprang from his chair. Both waited for the explanation. The new tenant of Number Nine was drowned in painful blushes as she glanced from the ham to the faces of the men and back again.

"Do forgive me !"

"Ye have not yet offended, to my knowledge," responded The MacWaugh. "But—if it is any satisfaction to your mind—we are baith content to let the matter drop."

Artemidora's blue eyes were puzzled, the puckers in her white forehead deepened.

"You see," she said, "I was looking out of my window"—there was in the eye of The MacWaugh a faint glimmer which under circumstances of less restraint might have become a twinkle—"and I saw your table, and thought it looked so—so Bohemian and artistic." She broke down.

"Life is buttered wi' looks," said The MacWaugh. "But ye are richt. Myself an' Mr. Rathburn—— Let me introduce him to you."

"My name is Bloss, Cicely Bloss," exclaimed the newcomer.

"Myself an' Mr. Rathburn, Miss Bloss," pursued The MacWaugh, "endeavour to furnish the world at small—in

our puir way—with a living example—I micht say two—o' the Life Beautiful. We tak' our meals in the open, to the accompaniment"—an organ beyond the archway plunged into "The Absent-Minded Beggar"—"o' music, and cats," said The MacWaugh, as a furtive tabby slouched from the dingy shelter of a laurel-bush with its one yellow eye fixed greedily upon the ham. "We would be sleeping o' nictis in the courtyard, I mak' no doubt, did not the uncerr-tainties o' the climate an' the provisions o' the Vagrancy Act restrain us. And—may I no' relieve ye o' that dish ?"

"I wish you would !" Miss Bloss from a pink rose had become a peony. "I—I brought it on purpose. Because I saw—I saw—" Tears seemed not far from the blue eyes. "I'm afraid it was ill-bred to watch. And it seemed so easy then; but now— Oh, do take it !" Miss Bloss set the absurdly large dish down upon the absurdly small breakfast table and fairly ran away. There was a brief silence.

"Does she suppose we are beggars ?"

Rathburn was livid, The MacWaugh a flaming sunset hue.

"An eleemosynary offering. . . ." He pulled his grizzled beard. "Ca' it a tribute from Beauty to Genius in distress. I am thinking it would no' be a bad subject for a fresco. Toch ! Dinna grind your teeth, Rathburn, but toss up which o' us is to run after Miss Bloss wi' her ham."

"Prut ! What is dis ?" Old Karl Voss, his white locks straggling from beneath his immense red woollen cap, his gray eyes beaming kindness behind their dusty spectacles, his rheumatic hand, encased in mufflers, thrust in between the buttons of his paint-stained brown velvet coat, had shuffled up in his immense goloshes in time to overhear. "She has made a liddle gontribution to de forache debart-

ment, und you are wounded in your dignities. Tomfoolery und *kinderspiel*! It is a kind child dat would make friends, nodding more—und has read de 'Vie Boheme'—(as motek as she understands of it), und dreams dat de artistic life is all sympathy und comradeship. Und when she holds out her hand to you mit a hom in it, you snub her. I am disgusted mit you both!"

"Toch, Karl, I'm thinking you're right!" said The MacWaugh repentantly.

"Of course I am right. Run after her—or I will myself go—und ask her to breakfast mit you upon her own hom—und be as akreeable as you can. Do not talk to me of de brobriedies, Rathburn. De brobriedies be damt! Let the brobriedies go live at Holland Gate, where are the fashionable painters und de fashionable studios. Dere is no room for dem in dese!"

And Karl shuffled away, taking three steps in his goloshes to one of Rathburn's long strides. The MacWaugh saw them knock at the door of Number Nine, and with a curious sensation, which he recognised with astonishment as bashfulness, turned away his eyes, as Plashwater, the only Academician of the studios and a resident feather in the landlord's cap, came suddenly out of the last green-painted doorway in the row, carrying a Della-Robbia milk-jug.

"Huts, Plashwater, but ye are bilious the day!" was The MacWaugh's morning greeting.

"Worse than usual!" queried Plashwater, turning an amber-tinted eye upon the commentator.

"Ye would pass unnoticed in an Indian jungle," replied The MacWaugh. "Or—painted wi' black stripes—ye might attend a Covent Garr-den Fancy Ball as a tiger, an' tak' a prize. Mair I canna say!"

"I struck myself as looking pretty bad this morning," said the Academician modestly. He glanced into the jug.

and sighed. "I admit it—I am depressed," he owned, when he looked out again. "Miss Jecks, my model, who is now sitting for 'Psyche,' is suffering from mumps. The alteration is awful, Waugh. No one would recognise her for the same girl. She——"

"Mumps," observed The MacWaugh, "may be ca'ed a complaint that changes the classic type into the bucolic wi' extraordinary rapidity. Ye have my sympathy; but, at the same time, does it no' strike ye, Plashwater, that Miss Jecks's deviation from the cauld propriety o' the Hellenic outline may be a blessing in disguise? For, speaking wi' the voice o' the outside public, we are in the way o' growing a'most satiated wi' the features o' Miss Jecks. Ye have painted her as Ariadne, an' Helen, an' Dido, an' Andromache; she has divided her perr-sonality amang your 'Three Nymphs Dancing in a Glade,' an' ye have shared her oot cannibalistically in sma' pieces between your 'Revelling Bacchantes'—here an eye, there an elbow, a nose to this one or a leg to that—till, as the poet puts it,

"'The Jecksed eye, torr-tured wi' vision, faints.'

I am thinking 'vexed eye' is the terr-m, but ye will no blame the liberal adaptation. Tak' a freend's advice, Plashwater, an' commit the new Miss Jecks to canvas, since your wife will suffer ye to paint from no other model than the auld one."

"Mrs. Plashwater has been sitting to me herself," said the dismal Academician.

"Toch!" ejaculated The MacWaugh sympathetically. "For Psyche?"

"For Psyche," Plashwater owned in hollow accents. "And I do not feel at all well. I feel very far from well to-day!"

"'Earth has some sorrows that Heaven canna heal,'"

misquoted The MacWaugh, as the Academician went sadly away with his Della-Robbia jug to fetch the breakfast milk from the Lodge—"at least, not if Mrs. Plashwater will be going there wi' Plashwater."

His reflections were cut short by the triumphant return of Rathburn with Miss Bloss. And if the coffee was cold, the ham, "cured at home in Hertfordshire," as its proprietress explained, was of very superior flavour. Throughout the meal Miss Bloss prattled to her companions of her aims, hopes, prospects, and circumstances with a childlike simplicity and confidence that was calculated, The MacWaugh said afterwards, to awaken the better feelings of a boa-constrictor.

She was, it appeared, the daughter of a smallish gentleman-farmer in Hertfordshire; and the irresistible impulse that had impelled her to hang blinds of Liberty muslin across the old-fashioned casement windows of the farmhouse, stack bundles of bulrushes in odd corners, and tie silk sashes round the waists of the flower-pots, had, after a course of instruction in free-hand, outline, design, and flower-painting at a local School of Art, impelled her "when Dad died, and everything was sold up," to choose for herself the artistic career. She had sixty pounds a year of her own, left her by an aunt, and meant to live upon that until she began to earn a "real income."

"And the rent o' the studio is fifty pounds per annum," groaned The MacWaugh in spirit, as he accepted, with Rathburn, Miss Bloss's shy invitation to "look at her pictures." His demeanour within the studio, strangely transformed since inhabited by the celebrated designer of impressionistic posters, was perfect.

"Almonds and Raisins on a Blue Plate," "Azaleas in a Green Jug," "Apple Blossoms," "A Hedge-sparrow's Nest," the eggs very speckled. There were about thirty

of these stiff little studies, and The MacWaugh went religiously through them all. But when he took leave—Rathburn remaining behind to assist in hanging a few of these works of art in favourable lights in case some wealthy buyer should happen to drop in, The MacWaugh retired to the Cavendish-scented seclusion of No. 5, and let himself drop upon a tattered divan in the attitude of the “Dying Gladiator.”

“How is she to live? How is yon young creature—no’ to induce baith ends to meet, but to make them distantly approximate, on saxty pounds a year—leaving oot the question o’ the rental?” The MacWaugh mused, gathering his brow into tremendous corrugations. “Were these the days o’ miracles, an’ that ham could be rendered inexhaustible—after the feshion o’ the Widow’s Cruse—But Artemidora is no’ a widow, an’ an exclusive diet o’ salt viotuals is allowed to be injurious to the constitution. Toch! for the lack o’ a prophet I am bound to step into the breach. But it is a problem—a gey tough problem—what is the best to do?”

The MacWaugh looked round. There was Rathburn’s easel in a good painting light—the only one the studio afforded. The canvas upon it was a clever, bluey-greeny, pretentious study of “Dryads Playing with the Young Pan.”

“As a youthfu’ saumon gangs to the sea to improve his flavour,” said The MacWaugh, nodding at this effort, “so ye will have to gang to Paris and Munich, lad Rathburn, to learr-n the secret o’ style. But there’s the root o’ the matter in you, if your Dryads’ gambols are suggestive o’ Hampstead Heath, an’ your Thessalian oaks were grown at Kew, an’ your local sunshine is cault an’ watery—like the local milk. Money must be found for that flight o’ yours—an’ shall.” He paused and smoked. “And for

present needs—Toch ! but existence would be one lang rapture," said The MacWaugh, "once the necesseety o' livin' were removed. We are slaves to our imperious backs—drudges at the pleesure o' our importunate stomachs. It scunners me to think o't ! But I hae an idea—o' a kind ! Whaur is my Gudrun ?"

"Gudrun Washing Clothes upon the Sands of Ormany," had been the subject chosen by The MacWaugh for his Academy picture this year. Of course, the immortal work had been cast forth with contumely by the Judging Committee. The MacWaugh would, he invariably said, have lost all respect for himself had this annual bid for Fame on his part resulted in anything but failure.

"They cast me forr-th into outer licht," he would say; "for the darkness is within—an' it is them that does the grinding an' gnashing o' teeth. Am showing my scorn o' them" (it is presumed he meant the Forty) "in that way. Ye micht ca' it an annual slap in the chops o' Ignorance an' Incapacity. Tell me, Plashwater, what did they do, man, when the two maist muscular porters on the premises propped up my glorious colour-scheme before their jaundiced eyes ?"

"They—they laughed !" Plashwater would say feebly.

"Dey loffed to schplit deirselves," old Karl Voss might corroborate, with a subterranean chuckle convulsing his own capacious waistcoat. "It is drue, ach yes ! for others have dold me; de Bresident esbpecially. And somebody gried out: 'Ach Gott ! It is a harmony in magaroni and tomato-sauce.' "

"An' then the welkin rang wi' merriment ? Let them lauch," The MacWaugh invariably retorted. "Such lauchter is the crackling o' thorr-ns—the crackling o' thorr-ns." But for a week he would be silent and smileless. Then, when the tin of strongest Cavendish was

empty, when the brick pavement of the coal-cellar began to show through the coals, and Mrs. Kitt's red account-book appeared with monotonous frequency beside his breakfast-plate, The MacWaugh would slash the grand scheme of colour from its frame, cut up the canvas into squares, restretch it, and paint upon the faces of his dead ambitions exquisite bits of Thames scenery which never failed to bring their price.

As he loosed "Gudrun" from her heavy gilt frame and ripped her from her stretcher now, his jaw was granite and his eye had the dull flicker of white-hot steel. He quartered her, his tomato-coloured darling with the macearoni hair; and before five of the clock were completed two pot-boilers of the kind most in favour with the dealers.

"What to ea' them? Toch!" said The MacWaugh, bestriding a chair and grating his rough chin upon the painty hands that gripped the back of it, "the son o' Solomon that will buy it seeks no Della Cruscan niceties from me. 'Sunset, Chubsey Weir' the ane; 'Dawn, Dipsey Lock,' the ither, an' they will bring me their seven pound apiece when I take them to the dealer's beneath my oxter, wi' my deboshed an' degradit genius squealing behind me, like a kittle pig in a string. I will follow up wi' twa mair—'The Old Mill: A Fine Day,' an' 'The Auld Mill: A Rainy Day'—an' may the Lorr-d have mairey upon my guilty soul! And I will be keeping my eye on Artemidora. When the bit pink dies oot o' her cheeks I will just be knowing that the wolf is at the door, or on the hearth-rug, playing the pairt o' house-dog," said The MacWaugh, with a heavy frown. "Women have the knack o' stairr-ving wi'out making mair noise than the cheep o' a mouse deeing in a trap, confoond them!"

THE INFAMY OF THE MACWAUGH

PART II.

THE MacWaugh did keep his eye on Artemidora. It is rather needless to say that Miss Bloss became a popular member of the little community gathered within the red-brick quadrangle of North-West Studios. Her reverence for Art was commensurate with her ignorance. For the classic nightmares of Millars, as for the *genre* imbecilities of Wybrow, she entertained the liveliest admiration. "Oh ! what wouldn't I give to be great—and paint like that !" she would say, clasping her slim white hands—Mrs. Plashwater permitted Plashwater to paint those hands in his picture of "St. Bridget Harping to Angels," though she herself sat for the face, which matches them indifferently. Before Plashwater she burned much incense, though the same generous censer swung for The MacWaugh, whom she learned to take at his own valuation as a colossal genius rejected by his countrymen and ignored by his age, but who would one day. . . . With Rathburn she was in love, quite frankly and simply; and of course that young man was to her the king of painters no less than the king of men.

And the weeks went on, and the roses began to fade. As The MacWaugh had predicted, Miss Bloss began to feel the pinch of poverty. Rathburn saw nothing—appeared blind to the hollows that were beginning to form under the blue eyes, the deepened puckers in the white forehead under the strands of silky fair hair. But The MacWaugh was keenly alive to these indications.

"The butcher hasna' chapped at the door o' Number

Nine this week," he said to himself uneasily. "I will be bound to speak the day."

And he did. With Machiavellian cunning he mentioned the dealer who, upon recommendation of The MacWaugh, might be induced to purchase for ready money some of the still-life bits; the willow-pattern plate and cracked-jug studies, the groups of flowers and fruit—badly drawn and finished with Chinese elaborateness—which feebly set forth Miss Bloss's claim to be considered "an artist."

"Of course," he said, laying a massive finger against his rough-hewn nose, "I would be taking my regular commeesion out of your profits—say a ten percentage. And the dealer-body (I will no' be giving you his address, for business is business)—the dealer pays ready money. That is a grand advantage!"

"Certainly," said Miss Bloss, with eyes that were already growing brighter, "it is a great—a *great* advantage, even though his profit is very large, for I suppose he will sell those studies of mine for much more money than he will pay me!"

"Could ye doubt it?" said The MacWaugh. "The man is a dealer—no' a philanthropeest!" he added anxiously; "and if three guineas apiece for some o' those smud—studies would be worth your having——?"

He carried the poor shabby little canvases away secretly, and consigned them to a cupboard by the fireplace at Number Five. Though it would have been safer to burn them, The MacWaugh was conscious. Still, the odd feeling that makes one reluctant to wipe from a slate the pitch-fork-handed, nought-headed men and the crooked houses a child has drawn, made the gnarled giant hesitate to destroy the evidences of his crime. So the cupboard, ever securely locked, became a Bluebeard's chamber, about which Rathburn—unconscious of its contents—cracked jokes. And

the dealer paid Miss Bloss, per medium of The MacWaugh (who evinced his Scotch canniness in demanding and receiving his ten percentage there and then). And the butcher regularly left half-pound steaks and loin chops at Number Nine, and the roses in Miss Bloss's cheeks bloomed anew.

Meanwhile The MacWaugh, in company with his oldest pipe, a rickety portable easel with a club foot and a battered box of oil-tubes, made many excursions Thameswards, and Dipsey Lock and Chubsey Weir were transferred to canvas under climatic and seasonable aspects of such dazzling variety that the market began to suffer from a glut, and The MacWaugh lying awake of nights upon the uncomfortable camp-bedstead that lurked by day behind a screen in the corner of the studio—the single bedroom being consecrate to Rathburn—tugged at his grizzled hair as he racked his Scotch brains for new ways of raising the wind.

One September morning, prowling forth care-laden, he encountered Miss Bloss.

"I have two new studies for Mr. Fulano," she said.

Mr. Fulano, it will be gathered, was the name invented by The MacWaugh for the imaginary dealer who paid three guineas apiece for the stiff little daubs Miss Bloss dignified by the above term.

"Though I say it"—Miss Bloss's grammar was unconventional if her "studies" were not—"they are infinitely beyond anything I've ever done. And I think"—she beamed innocently upon the careworn MacWaugh—"that I shall have to raise my price."

She dragged the dismayed Colossus into her studio.

"' Purple Clematis against a Red Brick Wall,'" murmured The MacWaugh, with a pain in the eye. "' Ay, and ' Aloes in Bloom.' Toch ! that will be a thing ye will see

only once in a hundred years," he added, dragging to the light this dusty scrap of horticultural information in time to save his own conscience and the feelings of Miss Bloss.

"I'm so glad you agree with me," she said; "and don't you think four pounds apiece a reasonable price? Tell Mr. Fulano that I must take my pictures to another dealer if he will not give me better terms. Though I should be sorry to do anything underhand, of course. Still"—she spoke with quite a new, businesslike tone—"if he realises a good large profit upon the sale of *My Work*—"

"He canna compleen? Toch! no," said The MacWaugh, rubbing his bristly chin, "if he is piling up his hundreds, as ye say. But if, on the ither hand—"

"Do what you can to bring him round," said Miss Bloss, with a little toss and shake of her fair head. "You know that my advantage means yours, in this case."

"Ay! Ye will be thinking o' the percentage," returned The MacWaugh, rubbing his hands and trying to convey a glare of greed into his eyes. Miss Bloss's smile was not unmixed with patronage.

"I am sure you earn it," she giggled, "with all the trouble you take. How funny it will be when I am great—*really* great, you know, like *Fuchsia Darton*, who has Royalty at her private exhibitions, and is asked to tea at Marlborough House!"

"Ye would not leemit your ambitions within such narrow bounds!" said The MacWaugh, in whose brain the awful mixture of incongruous hues perpetrated by Miss Bloss's ambitious brush had established a mild kind of madness.

"Oh my!" cried Miss Bloss, "you'll make me vain if you say much more! But, seriously, I hope Mr. Fulano will be a little more generous, I've been getting on so well of late that I thought myself justified. . . . The fact is, my sister Jenny is coming to live with me. She is nearly as

artistic in her tastes as me—though hers is talent, and not genius—and she will enjoy everything so much. Take care! You nearly dropped those studies."

For The MacWaugh had staggered under this augmentation of his burden. Sleep did not visit his eyelids that night.

"Her sister Jenny! I didna ken she had a sister," he muttered, as wakeful he lay staring at the door of Bluebeard's cupboard, which was growing very full. "Puir thing! she will be needing company. And it is generous o' her to think o' her folks in what must seem the first blush o' prospeerity. Don Fulano, my man, ye will be having to squeeze out that ither pound."

It may be said that the imaginary person did respond to pressure, and Jenny came to live at Number Nine. Like her elder sister, she was pleasing to the eye, and brimming over with delight in her Bohemian surroundings.

"The Powers are merciful," said The MacWaugh to himself. "She disna paint."

But Jenny did worse. She sculped. And by-and-by The MacWaugh was appealed to to procure a purchaser for certain gouty clay models of animals and children. The rough giant's fatal tenderness of heart forbade him to shirk the new burden of responsibility. Mr. Fulano became Jenny's patron—The MacWaugh painted more pot-boilers than ever, and a certain dusty cockloft under the roof-tree of Number Five received and concealed the bulky products of Jenny's talent—not of Jenny's genius.

"You haf some drobble?" said Karl Voss, examining The MacWaugh through his great dim spectacles. "Prut! do I not see? Your glothes dey hang upon your strugdure like pags, and you klare und motter to yourself like mad-mans when you dramp, dramp up and down de gourtyard. You haf some drobble!"

"Trouble is compareeve," said The MacWaugh, looking very gaunt and grisly as he leaned against Karl's doorpost in the warm twilight of early October. "An elephant is admitted to be a big brute—no bigger leeveng. But resuscitate a mammoth and place him beside the elephant, an' toch!—the latter creature will be dwindling to a mere greyhound by comparison."

Old Karl struck another bad little German-made match, which twinkled and smelt nasty and went out. "Som-poddy has a mammoth resdored to life und sent the prute to you," he said. "Und, py what I kuess, he is eading you out of house und home. Get rid of him, mein friend. Gif him to de nation, or sell him to de sausage-makers, dat is my advice."

"Advice," said The MacWaugh, knocking out the ashes from his pipe, "is the one thing ye may always count on getting for nothing. No' that I am ungrateful for yours," he added hastily, "but I am worrit an' out o' sorts."

"It is, of course, a money drobble!" said Karl. "Your Agademy canvas is eighdeen feet square, und will take tons und tons of baint to gover. Und den dere is de frame—ach yes!" His capacious waistcoat was agitated by a gentle subterranean chuckle. "Tell me, what is de subject you have chosen?"

"For the side-splitting annual joke?" queried The MacWaugh. "I am no' going to send in anything at all," he said. His rugged face had a granite composure. "There will be no crackling o' thorr-ns."

"*Teufel!*" said Karl. "You will mis de disabppoint-
ment!"

"Maybe, maybe!" The MacWaugh waved his hand grandly. "I'm no' denying it—but let that pass. Toch! A man canna' have his ham and eat it."

"His hom? You mean his blumcake," corrected Karl. He struck another match, shook his old head over its pale, ineffectual twinkle, and threw it down. "Already I haf used dree boxes of dese dings mitout getting a light for my pipe. A brobos of nodings, haf you heard dat de modder of de Miss Plosses—de bretty Ploss dat dries to baint und de not-so-bretty Ploss dat dries to mottle—haf you heard deir modder is komming to live mit dem?"

"Not until this meenute," said The MacWaugh after a rather long pause. Then—"As a naturaleest an' palæontologist o' some note," he continued rather irrelevantly, "ye can perhaps inform me—whether any larr-ger mammal than the mammoth exested in the prehistoric age o' the world?"

"*Ach, ja!*" said old Karl, nodding his red woollen cap. "Dere is drusdworthy cheological evidence dat de elephan-dine monsder of de Miocene beriod known as de mastodon was an infinitely pigger peast dan de later brobosidean. Poot I dink I understand dat you are talking barables. It is dis drouble of yours dat from an elephant has a mammoth krown, and from a mammoth has now a mastodon become. Is it not so? It is so! Und dere is anodder ding I understand. Dis dealer who puys de liddle oil smutches and clay-babies of de Ploss girls (dey have poasted of him to me many times), dis man would a damt fool be if he a real man was. Poot he is noding but Mister Nobody—Don Fulano—und de money out of your own bocket comes!"

"For Guid's sake, Karl," cried The MacWaugh passionately, "hold your tongue! Man! ye have lost your senses." His face glimmered ghastly in the fading light. "Ye are daft!" he added, choking with shame and dismay.

"*Schwerlich!* Koot-night," said Karl, nodding his red cap. And The MacWaugh strode back to Number Five with a whirling brain. Rathburn was there, lounging in a big chair, the end of the cigar (he smoked good cigars) glowing in the darkness like a Cyclopean eye. He addressed The MacWaugh with some sternness.

"Look here, you know, you've been putting your foot in it with a vengeance! The Blosses will never forgive you."

"Toch! Will they no' ? How ?" asked The MacWaugh, with an assumption of jauntiness which might have been worn with a yellow canvas suit stamped with broad arrows. "How have I incurred their condemneetion ?"

For answer Rathburn switched on the electric light, and the miserable deceiver collapsed instantly.

"Ye have been to the cupboard!" For Bluebeard's chamber stood open and bare. "Dinna say ye have betrayed me, Rathburn, to——" Words failed the guilty man.

"To Cissy Bloss? Why, she was here! We were joking about your being so mysterious, and wondering what you had got bottled up there—and I unlocked it with the poker. Cissy was furious," said Rathburn, with a sense of injury upon him, as he realised the true inwardness of the situation and the reason why the breakfasts, lunches, and dinners had been so infernally skimpy of late. "She said you had humiliated her to the dust; and she took the things away. She said she would never forgive you as long as she lived!"

"Forgive me!" The MacWaugh raised a gray face from the hairy covert of his great gnarled hands. "Toch! it's no' to be expected she would. Or Jenny either," he said brokenly. "I have behaved like a scoundrel to those

puir faitherless creatures. Man, Rathburn, if ye would shoot me ye would be rendering me a service—ay, an' mankind at larr-ge. To plot an' plan, to deceive an' lee, an' then to be found oot!" A sob broke from him; he turned it with but ill-success into a cough. "That harptwangling, step-dancing auld scoundrel David knew a thing or twa. The hairt o' man is desperately wicked an' full o' deceitfulness!" said the penitent MacWaugh.

THINNER THAN WATER

WE were stunned with grief when poor papa died, and the obituary notices in the Lomeshire Conservative papers said with truth that the loss of Sir James Adyat, M.P. and J.P., had deprived the county of its right hand, the House of Commons of a distinguished ornament, the Wollerton Bench of a benevolent and equitable magistrate; and a devoted wife, not to speak of a large and promising family, of a husband and parent beyond compare. We read these appreciative comments when the first shock of bereavement was over, and although neither Eggy or I—Eggy is the eldest of us all but one, and I am the one—had ever entertained much opinion of people connected with journalism, we agreed that the editor saw things in the right light.

These sad events create a terrible vortex in a household. From the day when the gout struck upwards and Sir Unicorn Gazebo was telegraphed for from town, everything was in a ferment. Then one of the grooms rode into Wollerton on Eggy's blood mare Meteor for old Mr. Hunt, poor papa's solicitor, and within a few hours from his arrival, in an old-fashioned hooded gig, with a clerk and a black valise, all was over, and the dressmaker was measuring all the feminine members of our bereaved household, beginning with the mater, for mourning. The blinds were all down; and as the great papier mâché rolls were opened, the smell of black dye seemed to issue forth and permeate the house. At the same time, to judge by the carpets of the mater's boudoir, where she was tried on, the library—

where Evangeline and I were fitted—and the school-room—where the younger ones were submitted to the same process—it rained pins.

Why is it unusual for ladies—unless they happen to be what people call “professional”—to attend funerals? I asked myself that question over and over again, on the day of poor papa’s entombment in the Adyat vault, as I sat in the darkened drawing-room—Evangeline was upstairs with the mater—and tried to read the Burial Service between the booming strokes of the Wollerton Church bell. It was not long, and when I had got quite through, including responses, my eyes wandered to the last new book from Mudie’s, which lay upon a little table close by with a paper-cutter temptingly stuck between the pages. I had dipped into it only the day before poor papa left us, and I was full of conjectures as to what the hero and heroine were going to do next. She—the heroine—was a fragile, fair-haired creature who thought nothing of getting out of her body and taking an aerial trip through space to a distant planet when she found this globe at all dull; and he—the hero—had by dint of constant practice, obtained such command over his electricity glands—the authoress says we all have electricity glands—that he could bring flashes of fire out of his finger-tips whenever he chose. Which power, if possessed by anybody who happened to be a confirmed smoker, would save a great deal in cigar and pipe lights, it occurred to me.

Well, it ended in my taking up that novel. I don’t know why I felt that I was doing something unfeeling and wrong, but I certainly hid the book behind the sofa-cushion when Evangeline came into the room. She went to the bell and rang for tea. In domestic affliction a great deal of tea seems necessary, and when the under-butler brought up the tray he did so for the third time that afternoon.

"How is the mater?" I asked with my eyebrows, and Evangeline answered, "Quite prostrate," with a kind of enjoyment of the sounding phrase, as she poured out the tea and lifted the covers of the dishes. There were American rice-cakes hot, and sandwiches of egg-and-anchovy toast. In domestic sorrow a great many little nicknacks of this sort are consumed. Then we heard the gravel of the drive crunch under a pony's trotting hoofs, and a double knock and ring announced a telegram. It was, in fact, a cable message from Cannes addressed to Lady Adyat, Wollerton Park, Lomeshire, and we opened it, the mater being so extremely prostrate.

I read the telegram. It ran: "*Just received news. Returning at once—Dodo.*"

"Who is Dodo?" wondered Evangeline.

"I haven't the least idea," I returned. "But she—or he—"

"It must be she," objected Evangeline. "What man would ever stoop to call himself 'Dodo'?"

"She might have wired 'terrible' news, or 'sad' news, or 'deep-sympathy-bereavement,' like Aunt Bosanquet," I said critically. "Of course, she—whoever she is—would be shocked at having conveyed such an idea to a prostrate mourner; but the message gives the impression of being quite pleased."

"Anyhow, she is returning at once," responded Evangeline, "and considering the weather here"—it was a cold March—"and the weather there"—she waved her hand in the direction where Cannes might be supposed to be situated—"she cannot be said to lack sympathy!"

"He!" I cried. "It is a he, after all. You know General Ambleside!"

"The elderly military dandy who contested Wollerton for the liberals last General Election?"

“The same. He wore a wig and stays.”

“So did the effigy our voters burned. How do you know his pet name is Dodo ?”

“The mater was talking to Lady Cockerell of Bangwood. ‘So the General has lost,’ said Cocky, as the boys call her. The mater sighed quite pensively, and said, ‘*Yes. Poor Dodo!*’ Then afterwards she owned to having known the General nineteen years ago.”

“A year before she married poor papa. Oh, Elfrida !” Evangeline’s rosy face grew long and remorseful. “To think of our gossiping like this when poor papa——”

The shot went home. I was glad I had tucked the new novel away under the sofa-cushion when Evangeline came in. But she was looking about as though searching for something.

“What is it ?” I asked. “Do you want anything ?”

Evangeline grew as red as a bunch of Rambler roses.

“Only a book,” Evangeline answered guiltily, “I—I had just begun to—I left it on that table !”

I gave her the Prayer-Book open at the Burial Service without a word, and she took it and went meekly away.

After the funeral things settled down, and the county neighbours began to call. And instead of saying “Quite prostrate, sir,” or “madam,” when visitors inquired as to the condition of the mater, Blewitt, the butler, would reply :

“My lady is a little more cheerful.” Crape suited the mater, who is tall and large and fair, and weepers showed off her Vandyke hands to perfection; though I believe that from the first her soul rebelled against her widow’s caps. And presently the General called.

Eggy and the boys made game of the General’s waist, his tight, varnished boots, and the too-obvious reality of his curling hair. He called again and again. By Sep-

tember he was established in a shooting-box in the neighbourhood which belonged to us, or rather to the mater until Eggy came of age. The mater had been left a life-interest in the property, the use of the park and sole control of everything until that coming-of-age, which would not happen for four years, as I, the eldest of the family, was but little over eighteen. I had been provided for in the will separately and specially by name, and though it had never occurred to me before, as poor papa had never been at all demonstrative, it was quite plain to me now that I had been his favourite child. And with this conviction strong in me, the duty of seeing poor papa's memory properly cherished seemed obvious. The sight of the General's dog-cart tilted up in our stable-yard offended and scandalised me. It was only six months since . . . and the mater was already . . .

Yes, the mater was already. The General had become a fixture in the house. The calmness with which Eggy—when home from Eton—and the others put up with the General made my blood boil. I began to read *Hamlet*, and clung to my black dresses long after the others had gone into half-mourning. I looked at poor papa's portrait—an unnaturally pink and juicy representation, subscribed for by the members of the Hunt—and compared it with the portrait—the wigged and padded portrait—of the General, standing in a tortoiseshell-and-silver frame upon the mater's Queen Anne *escritoire*. And dark thoughts grew and gathered in me. Ah ! how I loathed the aquiline nose of my father's supplanter ! I myself, unlike any other member of the family, possessed a Roman profile. How I wished—— ! But it was too late to alter now.

Then one day the blow descended. The mater kissed us all round, beginning with me, and said we were going

to have a new father. The others evinced surprise, and some annoyance, but this soon wore off. After all, Evangeline said, there was no accounting for tastes. The mater was to marry the General, nobody else; and if she . . . ! The hiatus spoke volumes.

“And,” said Eggy, who had left Eton and was preparing for college with the rector, “the will is all right and tight. A step-papa may dabble in the mater’s life-interest, but he can’t tap the Bank deposits, frolic among the securities, or cut down the timber. Therefore, bless the young couple ! May they be happy !”

“We shall have new frocks and hats !” cried the younger girls. The smaller boys, whom the General had tipped sovereigns apiece, cheered like the craven creatures they were. Joy prevailed. The General and the mater billed and cooed like the two pigeons in the tiresome French fable. Only I remained true to my ancient faith, to my ancient blood, and maintained an unbending attitude of defiance to the Usurper.

The Usurper—for so I called the General—attempted to open parallels. He lay in wait for me in the library, and approached, figuratively waving the olive-branch of peace. It was a Bond Street brooch—enamel and diamonds—in a white leather case, with D.M., the initial letters of his and the mater’s names, emblazoned upon the cover.

“This little memento, my dear Elfrida,” he was beginning, when I cut him short.

“I am obliged to you, General, but I cannot accept your little memento. I do not intend to be present at my mother’s second wedding !”

“Would you really put such a slight upon your mother as to refuse ?” the General began, with his aquiline nose hooking down over his dyed moustache, as it usually did when he was angry.

I caught a glimpse of our two faces in the library mantel-glass, and my nose was as hooked, my expression as repellent as his own.

"My mother has 'put a slight,' as you term it, upon things that are dear to me," I said coldly. "Does she expect me to forget, as easily as she has done, who was my father?"

A curious change came over the General's face. All the downward lines went up. His long nose flushed scarlet. He made one ineffectual effort to restrain himself, then—

"Ha ! ha ! ha !" he roared, clapping his hands to his tightly-confined waist. "Ho ! ho ! ho !" His eyes were brimming with tears of laughter. He fell into a chair. "Egad ! it's—it's—" As I rushed stormily from the room he was seized with another and more violent attack. "Wretched man !" I thought. "There must be madness in his family !"

The fateful day chosen for the celebration of the wedding arrived. I had yielded to the wishes of Egbert, as the head of our house, in consenting—though I pointedly avoided the ceremony—to be present at the breakfast. When the dreadful afternoon was over, and the last of our guests had driven away, I tore off my smart gala gown in the seclusion of my chamber, and danced upon it madly, vehemently. Time passed. The month of honey came to an end; the bride and bridegroom returned from the south of France.

The mater looked wonderfully young and blooming. The General, with a new set of the most expensive teeth, and a glossiness upon him of new dye and new happiness, danced attendance upon his bride with elderly devotion. They went out fishing together, and sketched, Dodo tying flies or impaling worms—of course, it was "Dodo, dear," and "Milly, darling," all round the clock—or carrying camp-stools, water-tins, blocks and easels. Mother de-

veloped an infantine accent of appeal that roused my worst passions.

“Dodo, darling,” she would say, “if this cow in the foreground is too big, I can easily turn it into a church.” And she would pout and slap him when he was a naughty boy—and he was such a naughty boy sometimes!

All this time I was the spectre at the banquet. I lost no opportunity of reminding them of poor papa, of quoting his sayings, of observing his wishes, of following his tastes, and behaving generally as the child of an exiled monarch. I believe I enjoyed myself in a gloomy kind of way, if other people did not.

At last the mater intervened. She summoned me to her boudoir, shut the door, and locked it.

She was dressing for a great county dinner given in honour of herself and the General; and as the soft milky light fell upon her handsome bust, and her fine face and still golden hair, I felt almost fond of her again. How could such a woman have thrown herself away on such a man? I reflected wrathfully.

“I wanted to speak to you in private,” she began, with a strange nervousness of manner that was new to me. Her white fingers threaded in and out among the falling laces of her dinner-gown; the diamonds on her broad bosom rose and fell stormily. “It is about—it had to do with your extraordinary treatment of your—your father.”

“Of my father!” I cried in a high voice, tossing up my head. I caught a glimpse of my dark, fierce eyes and keen-featured face reflected over her white shoulder in the great mirror before which she stood. “My father is dead,” I went on, “and you have put another man in his place; but I will never consent to call the General by that name—not while I live.”

Mother looked at me

"How strange," she said, as if speaking to herself, "that *she* of all my children——"

"Should be true to her blood!" I cried. "Yes, it seems odd enough, when you come to think of it."

"And odder still if you knew all!" said mother, in a queer muffled voice.

"My father was a good man," I was beginning, when she interrupted me.

"Sir James was a good man. He was kind—he forgave, and let be. I shall honour him all the days of my life; but in marrying again as I have done I do him no wrong. Nor you." She turned on me and lifted her hand almost fiercely. "Least of all you," she cried. "Now do you understand?"

She swung me round, facing the glass, and the secret of my own face rushed at me out of it—and I understood!

THE HALF LOAF

WHEN the *Vikiva*—a steam and sail vessel of nondescript form, but undeniable seagoing qualities, chartered in May, 1907, by the British Air Investigation Society, to convey the Expedition charged with the task of measuring the amount of carbonic acid obtaining in the atmosphere upon the east coast of Greenland—sailed from the port of Granton, N.B., carrying with the other members of the Expedition the well-known Jane Polkanet, certified surgeon and M.D. of Paris, in the capacity of ship's doctor, nobody who knew Jane even smiled, and the rest of the world, upon viewing the portrait of Jane as reproduced in the illustrated newspapers, felt its mind set at rest and its moral apprehensions relieved. True, the ship's cat and Jane remained the only representatives of the voteless feminine majority on board the *Vikiva*, but both Jane and the cat were of a quite remarkable personal homeliness. In Jane's case particularly, plainness amounted to genius. As she stood upon the quarter-deck of the *Vikiva*, surrounded by the mothers, sisters, cousins, and sweethearts who had come to bid the Expedition good-bye, she was frankly, undeniably, aggravatingly hideous. One must go to the grotesque human physiognomy as sculptured by the ecclesiastical builders of the Middle Ages to get anything at all approaching Jane. For the rest, she was a brainy woman with a pleasant voice, a skilled hand, a trained capacity—and a rather decent figure, it occurred to Commander Grierlow, as, in his official capacity as leader of the Expedition, he welcomed her on board. But only the relief conveyed to

Grierlow's jarred perceptions by the turning of Miss Polkanet's back, as, stoutly clutching a cherished leather case of surgical and scientific instruments, she turned from her private group of friends to descend the companion-way, was responsible for that notion of Jane's having a figure. She had, in truth, no more than a medicine-phial, as Commander Grierlow was later forced to own.

He was a handsome, robust, and still young man, unmarried, like the other members of the Expedition, most of whom wore lockets containing tresses of hair of the most stylish shade, and cases containing the letters and photographs of attractive young women who had promised to accompany them to the altar if they came back. One and all they took a great deal of comfort in the Doctor's excessive plainness. "It doesn't set you grousing, you know, to sit opposite a woman like that—what?" said the retired First Lieutenant, R.N., who was to attend to the meteorological, astronomical, and botanical departments.

And the First Mate, who was a recruit from the Merchant Service, and a recent widower, shook his head and smiled as he chewed the butt of a green cigar.

"I thought the Committee must be off their chumps," he said, "when I heard they'd chartered a female doctor; but when I saw her I understood 'em. Not half so much pining for home and beauty there won't be, I reckon, among you giddy young men, with her around."

The combined steward and cook of the *Vikiva* was at that moment remarking, with a giggle, to the Second Engineer, smith and machinist, "The doctor ain't going to be no bone of contention aboard, are 'er ?"

"With a dial like that of 'ers, you mean ?" said the Second Engineer. "If you were a bit more used to the Arctic you'd know better!"

"Wot d'ye mean?" hastily queried the steward-cook, who had a cultivated taste in beauty.

"I mean," returned the Second Engineer, "that on my last voyage, when the *Return* 'ad bin frozen in the Greenland floe-ice for eight months, I've seen the whole ship's crew, officers and skipper, climbin' on each other's backs to get a squint at a pinch o' green mustard-and-cress which one o' the stokers, who never washed, 'ad contrived to grow on a bit tore off 'is flannel undershirt."

"Cold makes some people go barmy, I 'ave 'eard," said the steward-cook, "but from child'ood I've always bin strong 'eaded, else I shouldn't have volunteered for this here Expedition."

"You wait," said the Second Engineer, shaking up the grounds in a tin pannikin of coffee supplied by the cook before he put the vessel to his prophetic lips. "Before we even reach the ice, cruising North, you'll be changing your opinion, and by-and-by you'll be as barmy as the best of us."

The *Vikiva* laboured and groaned as her thrashing engines drove her northwards, and before the first floe loomed out of the darkness of the inky sea Doctor Polkanet had become deservedly popular on board. By the time the sun had set over Snelfellsjökull's white-capped extinct volcano, and the dangerous promontory passed, the high basalt mountains of the Iceland coast began to give up their hidden harbours; by the time halibut-fishing, and kittiwake and seal shooting had palled upon the less sporting members of the Expedition, and colds, chilblains, and chills contracted in these pursuits had yielded to the Doctor's treatment, a chivalrous delicacy had usurped the place of a half-contemptuous, half-pitying indifference, and the subject of feminine beauty was *tabu* in general conversation by general consent.

"I don't want to be hypercritical, skipper," said the meteorological First Lieutenant to the Commander, "but you oughtn't to have apologised to the Doctor for the small size and general badness of the looking-glass in her cabin. It was a reference that we all felt to be unfortunate and without tact."

"She didn't seem to feel it as—as invidious or offensive, Whybird," said the Commander, flushing to his weather-beaten temples, "but of course I'll be careful; and if it comes to comparisons, my dear fellow, some of those Eskimo women we saw in Isafjord were even—ahem!—were a dashed sight worse looking than—than the Doctor!"

The Second Engineer overheard this fragment of dialogue and reported it, with embellishments, to the steward-cook.

"Did the Old Man say that? Why, I piped it myself no shorter than a for-night back," said the receiver of the intelligence. "When I've see the Doctor togged for a expedition ashore—in short woollen skirts with knickers, puttee-leggin's an' snow-boots, an' a reindeer-skin *parki* with the 'ood trimmed with wolf, the 'ole rig-out finished orf with wooden snow-blinkers—I've said to myself that if she was the prettiest young gal a man might dream o' walkin' out with, it wouldn't make a shadow o' difference, dressed up like that. An' I've come to the corncloosion as women's good looks counts for nothing without cloes. I mean," the speaker added, noting a rising flush indicative of outraged propriety upon the cheek-bones of his listener, "the kind of cloes wot sets off good looks."

The Second Engineer revealed a set of coldly-neglected teeth in a malignant grin.

"You're coming round, all o' you," he said exultantly, "by degrees, you are. When the floe-ice shuts in on us,

and the bloomin' Arctic rain comes down in solid organ-pipes, an' the men have to take turn and turn about on deck with marlinspikes an' spare spars, to keep the Polar bears from comin' aboard to dry themselves by the galley-fire, you'll come round more. When it freezes hard enough to split stones, an' the sup of bilin' tea you takes into your mouth changes into a frozen marble before it's 'arf way down; when you've read all the books aboard till you've got 'em by 'eart, an' played all the games till you could murder the blokes what invented 'em, then—mark my words—you'll come right round an' try falling in love for a change!"

"An' wot about you?" demanded the indignant listener.

"Wot about me?" harshly repeated the Second Engineer. "Why, I shall be as big a fool as any other chap aboard. More so, I shouldn't wonder!"

"Then we're all to change into somethink else," said the annoyed steward-cook, "and you're just to stop where you are?"

The Second Engineer declined to be drawn. He walked aft, chuckling, and, meeting the Doctor on her daily round, exhibited an inflamed thumb that dumbly called for professional attention.

"I can't think, Muddison, why you and the rest cannot exercise a little ordinary intelligence," said the Doctor, in her pleasant womanly voice, as she applied lint and anti-septic ointment with her accustomed deftness. "Fifty times a day I am applied to by somebody who wants to consult me about a chilblain, or a frost-bite, or something even more trivial. You're as helpless as a shipful of babies, upon my word! Suppose something were to happen to me one of these days, what on earth would become of you all?"

“Don’t speak of it, Doctor!” pleaded Muddison thickly. He sighed like a deflating motor-tyre and fixed upon the Doctor’s features a pair of eyes that bore a not distant resemblance to half-melted treacle-balls. And the Doctor started violently, and—for Jane Polkanet was but a woman—blushed as she snipped a strip of diachylon with a pair of surgical scissors. Perhaps she did not realise that she had come into her long-deferred heritage—that her woman’s birthright of soft words and admiring looks was hers at last. But later on, when the piled-up hummocks of floe-ice grew taller and taller and the snow blizzards howled wilder and more wildly in the standing rigging where the frozen seal-meat hung, and the Polar bears paid unexpected calls to test its quality—later on Doctor Jane Polkanet made the delicious, unexpected, overwhelming discovery, that from Cobbin, the cook’s mate and stoker, who held the lowest rating on board, to the Commander of the Expedition, every man on the *Vikiva* was more or less in love with her! Oh! rosy, blissful, glowing Arctic days! You should never have ended—for Jane Polkanet.

You are to suppose that Jane took it out of the other sex, once she had realised the glorious truth; that she was coquettish, wilful, changeable, melting, inconstant by turns. That she wrung hearts and severed friendships and dallied deliciously, hesitating long to choose between the three favourites who had easily out-distanced the rest of the field—I refer to the Commander, T. Grierlow, to the retired Royal Navy First Lieutenant who had charge of the meteorological department, and the Chief Engineer, a good-looking, brawny, blue-eyed Swede. The striving passion of the cook, reaching its highest expression in raspberry-jam pancakes, won him many a smile from the Queen of the Expedition, for which he paid bitterly in reproofs and snubbing from his superiors. Indeed, the carbonic acid

of jealousy was so freely generated in the atmosphere of the *Vikiva*'s chief saloon that the analysis of a sample would have afforded the Air Investigation Society matter for at least a dozen interesting discussions. The resources of the ship's medicine chest were taxed to the utmost in the department of regenerating saline draughts, and pills that refurbish the liver; and the Doctor, conscious of all the biliary disturbances that seethed around her, put her front-hair in papers every night at bedtime, stitched in the seclusion of her cabin at quite ravishing blouses, and, in unblushing defiance of the climate and the hygienic principles upon which, hitherto, her sane existence had been conducted, revealed each evening at the dinner-table a segment of the upper part of the thoracic region. A locket rested there. Whose hair, supposing it contained any, might be preserved within that metal shrine was a question of burning interest to the Expedition.

Everything must end, and the sole aim and end of the Expedition being an analysis of the components of the air of Greenland, the following May saw the *Vikiva* weigh anchor for home. It was known on board that the Commander, the meteorological First Lieutenant, and the Chief Engineer had severally proposed to the Doctor, and that Jane, giddily drunken with triumph as with new wine, was keeping her victims in play and prolonging their agonies. Betting ran high, the odds being in favour of the Commander, to whom the prize fell as the *Vikiva* dropped anchor in the port of Reykjavick. About midday she left for the British Isles, having taken on board the mails, of which the Expedition had been deprived for a whole year. Every packet directed in a feminine hand-writing contained a recent photograph of the writer, footed with a more or less affectionate inscription, and the spirits of Doctor Polkanet's disappointed adorers, under the restorative influences of

comparison, rose to zero. Indeed, as the Second Engineer did not fail to remark, the man aboard the *Vikiva* who exhibited marked signs of depression was the Commander of the gallant vessel. She had reached her Scottish port, and I will not tarry to describe her welcome. Suffice it that the Expedition were feasted, addressed, and interviewed to a pitch of excruciation, and the newspapers, to the maddening torment of the chafing Commander, and the extreme complacency of Jane—*his* Jane—made columns out of the romance that had blossomed in Arctic snowfields and under Greenland skies.

The dinners and speeches came to an end, the Expedition, paid off, broke up. Two of the lesser stars of the galaxy encountered in the red-curtained shop of a lightning tattooer on the night previous to an early departure by train.

“Watto!” said the Second Engineer, as he affably recognised the steward-cook.

“A’oy, matey!” said the steward-cook with familiarity that bred contempt. “Take your turn first with ole Ink-an’-Needles ’ere. I ain’t in so much of a ’urry as you!”

“Take yours,” said the Second Engineer, “and then I shall *know* what sort o’ precautions I shall ’ave to resort to.”

“For wot?” demanded the steward-cook.

“For the prevention o’ blood-poisonin’,” said the Second Engineer with an ill-favoured grin. “The bloke what went before may—I don’t want to wrong ’im—but he *may* have bin even less addicted to washing ’isself than wot you are.”

“Wot I want,” said the steward-cook, after a brief mental struggle, addressing the operator, “is for you to kiver up a letter I’ve tattooed on myself, just below the elber ’ere, with a mermaid, or a Union Jack, or some’ink tasty of the kind.” He removed his coat as he spoke.

"I'll lay 'arf a dollar, before you roll your sleeve up," said the Second Engineer, "that the letter comes between I and K."

"And wot if it does?" gruffly demanded the cook-steward as the lightning tattooer, who seemed fatigued, commenced his task.

"Nothin'," said the Second Engineer, blandly, "on'y my job's own brother to yours. I've got a J 'ere, I'm going to blot out with a anchor. Sign o' 'ope, ain't it?" He addressed the operator as he too removed his heavy pea-jacket and rolled up his left shirt-sleeve, revealing a large blue initial in a prominent spot below the biceps.

"I haf had a voonderful run of pizness in dis special line to-day," said the operator, in the accent of the Fatherland, as he jabbed with a treadle-worked needle at the wincing flesh of the steward-cook. "Twenty-nine ledger chays haf I oblidderaded since yesterday, mit angors, mermaids, Union Chacks und hearts. Now you two chentlemen pring up de number to dirty-von."

"And thirty-three souls was the number of the Expedition," said the Second Engineer reflectively, "countin' the Skipper an' Doctor Polkanet."

"I pity the Skipper, pore beggar! from my 'art, I do," said the steward-cook, as he smilingly contemplated a completed Union Jack. "He can't cover up the mistake he's bin an' made, like us."

"He's going to do wot's equal to coverin' it," said the Second Engineer. "An' the step he's took shows plain, it does, that he is a man of sense. He's took command of the South Polar Deep-Sea Investigation Expedition, what sails from Adelaide, Australia, in July, and him and the Doctor will be married by special licence to-morrow, sail by P. and O. for Suez and Aden, and take the Currie Line, going by Leuwin Cape, for their port o' departure. And until he

weighs anchor for the South Pole I'd advise the Commander to wear rose-coloured spectacles. By the time he's smelt floe-ice agin he'll be capable of leaving 'em off, and for the followin' three years—which is the time, barrin' accidents, the Expedition stays in the South Arctic—without a comparison to challenge his contentment, the Doctor being the only woman aboard, as on the *Vikiva*, he'll be as happy as a married man can expect to be."

"And 'ow about when 'e comes 'ome, in three years' time ? " was the acid query of the steward-cook.

"I wonder at your iggorance," retorted the Second Engineer. "Why, by the time a man 'as bin married three years he don't as much as know whether his wife is uncommon good-lookin' or outrageous ugly. It's wot they call one o' the merciful compensations o' Providence, that's wot it is, and don't you forget it. I'll trouble you to do me that anchor now, Ink-an'-Needles, if you're ready, and don't you jab too deep, or I might ketch you a clip over the 'ead before I think."

And the Second Engineer, with an encouraging smile, submitted his left biceps to the operator.

A ROYAL BETROTHAL

WHO does not know San Salino, that southern seaboard Elysium where health and pleasure-seekers of all types, grades, degrees, and nationalities do congregate, arrayed in bath-towelling, shod with rope sandals, and crowned with broad-leaved palm-leaf hats. Here the Bordeaux merchant lays down his cares, oblivious of the rise in glucose or the increased import tax on logwood. Here the American millionaire shifts for a while the burden of his millions, the English peer is said to occasionally forget that he is Somebody, and here the Crowned heads of Europe play at being Nobodies with more or less success.

The high, chocolate cliffs that guard the coast are honey-combed with caves and broken by sandy bays and little coves, rock-girt Avalons of pine-and-sea-scented healing and repose. Before you, the green Atlantic thunders upon miles of creamy sands, and behind the verdurous country undulates to the pine-clad foot-hills of the Pyrenees. The harbour lies on the southern side of a grim promontory crowned by the ruins of a Saracenic Castle and the *Établissement des Bains*, and the Casino, the theatre, and the sandy golf-links have in the season—a comprehensive one—their crowds of devotees. Beyond the town, with its huge hotels and cosmopolitan boarding-houses, set in cactus-starred, ilex-shaded gardens, are the bungalows and villas of Monarchs, crowned and uncrowned. There is a sheltered cove on the northern side of the castled promontory which is in especial favour with children, and here two little people, a grave, fair boy of eight and a black-

eyed girl of seven, found themselves alone one June day. On the silvery-gray border of wet sand left by the retreating tide the girl was dancing, some shells of the razor-fish serving her as castanets, clicking the accompaniment to her improvised *cachucha*.

“Snow, snow!” she sang; “Fairy snow!” as the breakers thundered on the honeycombed reef-ridges and spent themselves in hissing sheets of dazzling whiteness.

The boy, who wore a Basque *boino* of blue upon his fair curls, a crimson string sash about his coarse linen blouse, and peasant-shoes of rope upon his slim, bare feet, stood looking doubtfully at the girl, who danced on to her shell-music, and seemed to take no heed of him. She too wore a short loose frock of unbleached linen, but it was curiously embroidered at the throat, hem, and sleeves with silk of bright, barbaric hues, and gaudy tassels adorned her hempen footgear. Her slim, brown arms and legs, like the fair limbs of the boy, were bare, and her rich chestnut-brown locks danced as she did, without restraint, for her broad-leaved palm hat had fallen off and lay upon the sands, where the little pink crabs were scuttling amidst the ripple-marks, and the air-bubbles of hidden shell-fish quivered and shone like bells of crystal in the hot, bright sunshine.

“Fairy snow!” she went on singing; “Fairy, fairy, fairy snow!”

The boy was not sure whether he liked her or not. Certainly she was pretty—but then to dance like one of the Basque peasant-girls, out in the open air upon the sands, with the sky and the sea and the cliff-martens looking on! It seemed “unbecoming.” That was a word the boy was weary of. It was ever on the lips of his governors and tutors. Only that morning Professor X. had used it because the boy had made a little, little mistake in geog-

raphy . . . "It is unbecoming, your Majesty!" Ah! the boy could hear the pedagogue's grating voice and see his long, hooked nose as plainly as one does see and hear things one hates to remember! "Your Majesty must be aware that it is unbecoming that a monarch should be inadequately informed as to the extent of the colonial possessions pertaining to his Crown. Your Majesty will descend to write 'The Laffarin Islands' in your copybook fifty times over." For the fair pale boy of eight was the King of Ibera, and the small hand that played with a Basque stick, oddly ornamented in the peasant fashion with rings of metal, would one day wield a sceptre. He was weary of lessons and lectures, and that day seemed very dim and far-off; but the sun was shining and there were lovely shells and weeds lying on the sands at his very feet, and one could forget the multitude of things that were unbecoming if one had someone to play with. At home, at the palace, there was Enrique, the head-gardener's son, who sometimes was allowed to share the King's amusements. Enrique, too, talked of things that were "unbecoming," and was a dull, tame kind of boy; but, when one had no other boy to play with, even Enrique was better than nobody. He wondered what Enrique would have thought of this queer little dancing girl. Then, for courtesy was a branch of education in which the King had never needed instruction, he moved forward and picked up the hat that lay upon the sands beside the print of a tiny foot half-filled with sea-water.

As the King did this, the girl-child stopped dancing, tossed back her curls, and smiled. At least, there was a gleam of small white teeth between the scarlet lips as the King took off his bonnet with a pretty grace and held the hat out to her, saying in French, "It was getting wet, Mademoiselle, lying there; and that out beyond"—he

pointed to the breakers—"is not snow, only foam. And—there are no such things as fairies. They do not exist—"

"Ah, bah ! As if I did not know that !" said the girl, still panting from the dance. Her eyes were of an odd agate-colour and fringed with wonderfully thick black lashes, and her chestnut-coloured eyebrows were traced on her delicate temples as though a fine pencil had drawn them. And her flushed face was like a ripe nectarine. "One pretends—when one wishes to amuse oneself. And here it is so *triste* and dull !"

The King opened his eyes at this. She had seemed so happy, and all the while she had been pretending ! Now, she cried out with admiration that seemed quite unfeigned, "Oh, *la, la !* The stick—the lovely stick ! Who gave you that ?"

"It is a Basque stick, Mademoiselle," the King explained. "The peasants make them, and I bought this—it was not given to me." He stopped, for the girl's eyes asked for it, begged for it, entreated for it, coaxed for it.

"Monsieur, I beg of you, let me have it in my hands ! How pretty it is ! How happy you must be to possess such a stick !" She hugged it to her breast, as though she could not part with it, and, though the staff of mottled grenadilla, inlaid with arabesques of gold upon steel, was dear to the boy, he yielded it.

"Keep it, Mademoiselle." He did not say, "I will buy another," for they kept him very short of pocket-money, and permission to spend what he received was a concession gained with trouble. But to refuse a lady's request, that would be impossible, the King felt. And the agate eyes asked, if the lips did not.

"You may keep the stick, Mademoiselle," he said gently. The agate eyes sparkled with delight.

"How good of you ! But why call me Mademoiselle ? I am Marie. Oh, look at the beautiful red flowers !"

The glowing trail of weed she pointed to lay stranded at the sea-brink one moment. The next wave might snatch it back into the treasury of ocean. The King sprang towards the prize and snatched it up as the wave broke and hissed about his little white ankles. Then he brought the long scarlet trail in triumph back to Marie.

"Hold my hat and stick !" she said imperiously. Then, with a few deft thrusts and turns, she made a wreath of the seaweed and set it on her rebellious curls, and looked at him, smiling, crowned with the fantastic splendour. He knew there were no such things as fairies out of childish books, but if Marie had spread gossamer wings and taken flight he would hardly have been surprised. "I will make you a crown, too," she said, with a little, gurgling laugh, "and then we can play at being a King and Queen. Come, let us look for more of the red flowers !"

But the King held back.

"Crowns are not made of seaweed or of flowers—at least those that are worn by Kings," he said. "They are of heavy metal, and hurt the head."

"They are of gold and jewels," cried Marie, tossing her lovely head. "As though I did not know that ! I wanted to make-believe, and you will not help me. We could have built a palace out of sand, and played at reigning over a kingdom together."

The King's face grew grave and earnest.

"Mademoiselle, we are too young to reign. There is the minority during which a Regent occupies the throne. If you were a Queen, you would not be allowed to play at reigning. You would study under your governors and tutors almost all the time, so that you should know how to reign in earnest when the time came. You would——"

But Marie, looking into the anxious face, burst into a delighted giggle.

"You are such a solemn little boy!" she cried, when she could speak. "Of course, it must be very stupid, all that; but I am not a Queen, nor are you a King, so it does not matter!" She shrugged her pretty shoulders.

The King realised that, to this dazzling little creature, a commoner herself—he, too, was a commoner. The incognito he relished; it was intolerable to be called a solemn little boy. He caught his breath and began eagerly:

"Mademoiselle——"

"Call me Marie."

"Marie, I do amuse myself. There are many things . . . military manœuvres, evolutions, ceremonies, and so on, that interest me." His dreamy eyes brightened. "Sometimes, early in the morning—before lessons begin, I stand at the open window when they are changing the guard in the Pal—in the courtyard. And I listen to the music and watch the movements of the soldiers, and if one has burred his breastplate badly, or buckled his belt awry, I send for the officer, and the man is punished, for soldiers should obey the Regulations."

Marie clapped her hands.

"Go on, go on!" she cried. "Just now, you said you didn't believe in fairies, and now you are telling a fairy-tale. You are the very queerest little boy! You sending for the officer! Oh, do go on! Make up more!"

"I will go on, but I do not make up," the boy said. He pointed to a rock with an overhanging canopy fringed with alge. "Let us sit down."

"It looks just like a throne!" Marie threw herself down upon the sun-warmed stone. "Sit here at my feet," she

commanded. And the King obeyed. He looked at the bare, brown, tiny feet.

"I will tell you something else, since you wish it. Last Maundy Thursday, I washed the feet of twelve old men and twelve old women——"

The proud little nostrils dilated with disgust.

"Oh ! That is a horrid story !"

"No; it is true—quite true ! It was at the Cathedral of San Ignacio. The Cardinal-Archbishop held the silver basin and there was a solemn Mass. I gave the people new clothing and food; salted fish and ham and cheese, a dole of so much to each, besides gold and silver in little crimson bags. It is the Royal offering. Then, the next day, came the Royal pilgrimage. The whole Court, dressed in deep mourning, goes out on foot to visit all the churches in the city, led by the King and Queen. Whether it rains or hails, it would be the same. This year it rained. My mother said, when I showed her how the wet dripped off my sleeve, 'My son, the Monarch of Monarchs, went shelterless in all weathers that our souls might find shelter through Him. Shall the King of Ibera grumble, then, at a few drops of rain ?'"

"The King of Ibera !" Marie, who had thrown herself almost at full length upon her rock, sat up with a sudden accession of primness.

"The King of Ibera ? I know all about him."

"Pardon, Mademoiselle; I think not," said the King.

Marie screamed with laughter.

"Oh, you stiff, stiff, poky little prig ! Must nobody know anything but yourself ?"

The King rose, very pale, and took off his cap.

"Mademoiselle Marie, you are unjust, and, what is nearly as bad, you are rude, and I will leave you." He bowed and turned away, but a sob broke from him, and

the blue eyes brimmed with tears that were sternly kept back. Marie jumped up.

"Come back!" She stamped one small, rosy foot imperiously, then uttered a shriek of pain, for a spiny, dried sea-urchin had punished the poor foot severely. The King forgot his resentment, and ran back to her.

"Ah, the horrid, nasty, spiky thing!" she cried, and hurled the echinus from her vengefully. Then she sat down, and the King knelt beside her. The wounded foot was solemnly inspected.

"It bleeds," said Marie, with quivering lips, as a tiny, bright-red bead followed the withdrawal of a prickle.

"I am so, so sorry! I wish I knew what to do to make it well."

"At home . . . they would kiss it," suggested Marie, with demurely dropped lashes.

"I will kiss it if you wish. Do you wish me, truly?"

She nodded, catching her breath, between a whimper and a giggle, as the boy stooped his fair head and touched the pink foot with his lips.

"It is nicer than kissing the beggars' feet, as I did at San Ignacio," he said as he rose.

"I am tired of that make-believe. Don't do it any more," ordered Marie. "I prefer to talk about myself for a little. Once, I ran away from the Schloss——"

"Where is the Schloss?"

"At home, in Germany . . . ?"

"So you are German? I'm sorry," said the King pensively.

"Germans are nice. Why are you sorry?"

"Oh, because . . . Tell me why you ran away?"

"I was tired of my *gouvernante*, Madame von Bern. . . . I wanted to go to school with the village children. So I ran away. . . . I got to the school just as they began to

sing. The schoolmaster got so red in the face when I walked in and took my place with the other children, and joined in—as loud as I could. But Gretzel, Papa's head-bailiff's little girl, didn't seem pleased. . . . She came and pulled me by the sleeve and said, ‘ Highness, it is unbecoming that the daughter of a Prince should sing about going to the Himmel with the village *Kinder*. And then a carriage drove up and my *gouvernante* rushed in like mad and carried me away. And they—but I won't tell you how they punished me.’”

The King was silent. Then he asked:

“ But why did the head-bailiff's little girl say ‘ a Prince's daughter ’? ”

“ Because papa is a Prince, goose ! ”

“ It is not like a Princess,” said the King, “ to call names.”

“ Do you know any other Princess ? ” said Marie with some hauteur.

The King smiled.

“ There are my sisters, Sofia and Estevana.”

“ And don't they ever call names ? ”

“ Never ! It would not be etiquette.”

“ Sofia and Estevana,” repeated Marie. “ Such odd names ! . . . What is your name ? ” she added, as an afterthought.

“ Carlos Eduardo Cristiano Godofredo,” the King enumerated obediently.

“ Mine is Marie Sophie Charlotte, but I don't believe you are really called Carlos Eduardo, and all the rest,” said Marie. “ The name belongs to somebody else quite different—somebody who really is what you played at being just now.” Her eyes grew dreamy. “ They say he is a beautiful boy, and that one of these days. . . . What ? Are you really going ? Why ? ”

For the King, with a clouded aspect, had risen to his feet.

“Mademoiselle, you doubted my honour just now. You said you did not believe me !”

“About the name ?” Marie dimpled into smiles. “Don’t be cross, but come back and sit by me again. Of course, more people than one may be christened by the same name. Tell me, why don’t you call me Marie ? I said you were to !”

The admission came.

“Because I don’t like Marie, or Sophie, or Charlotte. It is a secret, why not.”

“Tell me !” cried Marie, leaning over and taking hold of the crimson sash. Then as the King moved nearer, she rubbed her round, velvet cheek against the shoulder of the linen blouse, repeating, “Tell me !”

The King, yielding, held down his chin and bashfully whispered into the chestnut curls, “Because the Government and the people say that I am to marry her when I grow up.”

“Oh, you story !—at least, I didn’t mean that ! Perhaps your Marie Sophie Charlotte is another girl.”

“She is the Hereditary Princess of Hochwitz-Altenlied,” said the King sadly. “I am to marry her when I grow up,” he repeated. “It is for reasons of State, and I must do my duty.” He put his arm round Marie’s waist, and pressed his pale cheek against the chestnut curls. “But I had rather marry you, dear !”

But Marie pushed his arm away, and sat regarding him quite sternly.

“You are telling another of those things you don’t like to be accused of telling,” she said, “and you make me sorry I apologised just now. For my papa is the Hereditary Prince of Hochwitz-Altenlied, and I am his only child —so there ! And presently, when I am old enough, I am

to make an alliance with Carlos Eduardo Cristiano Godofredo, King of Ibera. And I don't think you as nice as I did, and I am going to look for my *gouvernante*. I was never left alone so long in all my life before!"

"Oh, Marie!" pleaded the King, "Oh, Marie! 'Alone' when you're with me!"

Marie relented, and moved a little nearer.

"What pretty curls!" she said, and put up her hand and stroked them. "Tell me your real true name, and I won't be angry any more. I should like to know it," she added, "to remember you by when I go away back to the Schloss; for I haven't anyone to play with except the Herr Cancelarius' little girl, and she's a stupid-head. I'm tired of her. I'm tired of everything they let me do, and all the other things that seem as if they would be interesting are 'unbecoming a Princess.' I daresay it's 'unbecoming a Princess' to be sitting like this, with my head on the shoulder of a boy I never saw before."

"No, dear," said the King.

"They would say so," asserted the Princess.

"Not if they knew that I was the King of Ibera!" said Carlos proudly, and kissed Marie upon the cheek. She doubted no more.

"How queer, our meeting like this!" she said, leaning her cheek to his.

The children looked in each other's eyes. In the background, behind a conveniently situated rock-buttress of gigantic size, penetrated with loopholes suitable for spying purposes, a lady and gentleman of middle-age, dignified appearance, and lofty manners, who from this vantage had been witnesses of the meeting, exchanged a significant glance.

"The plan succeeds beyond dreaming!" ejaculated the lady, who was the Princess's *gouvernante*, the Baroness von

Bern. "The Prince of Hochwitz-Altenlied will be overjoyed!"

"And Her Majesty the Queen of Ibera," said the King's governor, Professor Don José Alejandro de Sanchez Pachilla, "will be enchanted when I inform her that the conduct of His Majesty during this trying interview, the fruit of so much correspondence, anxiety, and diplomacy, has been in no way unbecoming to a King."

THE CURSE OF THE MACWAUGH

THE MacWaugh was a firm believer in Will Power—his own especially—and, when wound up with whisky and set going by the jog of incredulity, would discourse at length upon this favourite subject. He would prove, infinitely to his own satisfaction, that Tweedie had dropped in at No. 5, North-West Studios not, as Tweedie himself explained, because he had made up his mind a week previously that he would do so, but because The MacWaugh had been thinking of him that morning; and the weaker will, swayed by the powerful mental influence exerted by that great unappreciated genius, had—the genius claimed—obeyed the unspoken summons. Discussions of this nature invariably culminated in shoutings and closed in estrangement, because nobody likes to be called weak-willed.

“But I am no’ calling ye anything o’ the kind,” The MacWaugh explained, sweeping aside the intervening clouds of Cavendish with a broad, free gesture. “Man, ye might be possessed o’ mental power sufficient to draw a bathing-machine, an’ yet, ance in the grips o’ a Will like mine, be as helpless as a sperm whale in the tentacles o’ a Kraken. Tell me, do ye feel naething when I fix my een strongly upon ye? A tingling in the nerves, like, or may be a spinning in the heid, would be attributable to the wor-king o’ the Influence. Judge now if your sensations are norr-mal or the reverse!” And the painter of that gigantic conception, “Cosmos before the Light,” folded his power-ful arms upon his massive chest, and, throwing back his shaggy head, directed upon the rebellious Tweedie the compelling forces of his dynamic glance.

Tweedie, who was a small, wiry Northumbrian, rose, as if in obedience to some unspoken mandate, and all held their smoke breathlessly.

"I recall it all now," said Tweedie, and the sentence came in jerks as though gouged out of him by the irresistible will of The MacWaugh. "Conscious volition *had* nothing to do with my coming here to-night. I acted under orders, obeying a mental summons, telepathically issued by you."

"*Donnerwetter!*" grunted old Karl Voss. "Dat is altogether asdonishing."

He sat up in The MacWaugh's great ragged leather arm-chair, with curiosity gleaming behind his huge dim spectacles, and gestured for silence with a mittened hand.

"Tooch!" said The MacWaugh, with a smile of conscious power. "I thought I could no' be mistaken. Continue, Tweedie, man!"

"It was," continued Tweedie, "about three o'clock in the afternoon when I received your message."

"I began to fix my mind upon ye earr-ly in the forenoon," said The MacWaugh.

"Probably," said Tweedie, with gravity. "But a block in the circuit might have prevented your getting through. Did you have anything particularly solid for luncheon, for instance?" His expression was so earnest and sincere that The MacWaugh's brow, which had clouded ominously, cleared as he nodded affirmatively. Tweedie went on. "About three o'clock, as I have said, I became conscious of a tingling in the spine, accompanied by a dizzy sensation in the head. Then—close at my left ear"—he tapped the organ referred to—"it seemed to me that a Voice was speaking. It sounded very thin and far away," said Tweedie, looking round upon his absorbed and silent hearers. "In fact, it was more like the faded negative of a

voice than anything else. But it spoke with a Scotch accent, and I smelt whisky. Then I knew the Voice was MacWaugh's."

The countenance of The MacWaugh seemed carved in granite. . . . Karl's goloshes were agitated, and by the time the chuckle had reached and convulsed the waistcoat of the aged painter the studio was a syndicate of smiles. Tweedie went on in a level, toneless way:

"The mandate issued by the Voice was very simple, but my volition was so completely under the influence of the unseen speaker that I did not, for one moment, resist. I was to come up to No. 5, North-West Studios at eight o'clock——"

"Toch!" said The MacWaugh, nodding again. "It was the varry hour!"

"I was on no account to travel by the Bayswater omnibus," resumed the imperturbable Tweedie, "but to take a hansom cab. 'The fare is three-and-sixpence,' the Voice said quite clearly and distinctly. 'And, Tweedie, man, I will stand the money.'"

A yell of laughter went up to the cobweb-festooned skylight as Tweedie extended his palm towards his outraged victim.

"Ye Newcastle grindstone!" snorted The MacWaugh, as he unwillingly surrendered the coins: "I might have kenned from the beginning ye would be turr-ning to your ain advantage. It is weel for you, Tweedie, my joe," he went on, blowing down the stem of his pipe until it bubbled and squeaked, "it is weel for you that I am not a vindeective man. Else I would knot a tawse for you, Tweedie, that would gar you loup wi' every skelp."

The sternness of his glance and the quiet assurance of his tone abashed the man of Newcastle. Tweedie offered The MacWaugh sixpence back if he would explain. And the

gigantic Scotchman did so, holding forth at length upon the tortures that can be inflicted upon offending individuals by persons possessed of the requisite mental power. He spoke of media physical, mental-physical, psychological, and hypnotic. He toyed with zoo-magnetism or *nervaura*, and dallied with the phenomena of the Sixth Sense. From the twentieth century he skipped to the sixteenth, leaving Liebault and Coates for Paracelsus and the Thaumaturgists. Then he sauntered among the family curses of by-gone generations, and explained the manner of their working. He was great upon bans and maledictions of all nationalities, shades, and varieties. And having proved to the general relief and his own satisfaction that these things were worked by will-power, The MacWaugh went on to explain what havoc the curse of a man like himself, stern, dour, unbending, pitiless, and possessed of such an extraordinary voltage of this valuable force, might wreak at pleasure.

This hypothesis Tweedie begged liberty to question, because, as he pointed out, Burlington House was still standing firmly upon its foundations.

"Toch ! It may stand," said The MacWaugh scornfully, "for a buzzing auld bee-skep o' ignorance an' incapacity. I will no' meddle wi' the Academy. Let them job and wire-pull, blether and blurt. Let Billson an' his peers cast out the works o' genius with howling an' gnashing o' teeth, an' hang themselves and their relations unto the thirr-d an' fourth generation. Selah ! Besides, there is Plashwater to be thought o'," added The MacWaugh seriously.

"I understand. You would not curse the Academy wholesale because of Plashwater," said Karl Voss. "He is of de Forty, und for him you have a rekard. Ach yes ! But von man of whom you did speak choost now you might curse, is it not so ? Dere is dat *schafskopf* Pillson, dat

bainter of glassical draperies to glassical heads attached. Of de podies I speak not, for dey are not dere." Karl wagged his head until the red tassel of his woollen cap vibrated, and spoke in coaxing, seductive tones.

"It would be a goot—a cabital idea to curse Pillson. For von ding, he knows noding about de Human Sdrugdure, and for de oder, does he not loff to schplit at your kreat hisdorical gompositions ?"

"Toch ! Ye are speaking truth for once, hoary as ye have grown in the ways o' unveracity," said The MacWaugh. "I am no' forgetting the scores I have chalked up against Billson. His thorr-ns have crackled against Heaven and against me this many a year. Do ye mind when he ca'ed the 'Gudrun Washing Clothes' a harmony in macaroni an' tomato sauce ? the daft, blind, Guid-forrsaken creature ! Heaven may forgie Billson," ended The MacWaugh, with a brief historical reminiscence; "for mysel', I canna !"

Karl, whose conscience pricked him at the mention of the "Gudrun," shuffled uneasily in his goloshes, but The MacWaugh, with stiffening muscles and burning eyes, wound up the recital of Billson's enormities by saying that Billson should be cursed there and then, and roundly. General acclamations attended on this announcement, and previously fortifying his Will Power with a peg, The MacWaugh pronounced a malediction of the most comprehensive and searching kind, calculated to keep Billson's Fates in lively employment, until, after wandering an outcast upon the face of the earth for the duration of a period prescribed by The MacWaugh, that unfortunate should die with unlooked for and painful suddenness and be buried in a bone-heap.

"*Schön ! Wunderschön !*" cried Karl, with beaming glasses. "To be buried in de bone-heap, yes ! because he will never draw de bones gorreectly while he is alive. *Ach*

ja ! dat will be vat you call boetic chustice for Pillson." The aged artist chuckled. "Tell me, Waugh," he added, rubbing his hands together with infantile delight, "where you are learning to curse like dat ?"

"It is in after-life," replied The MacWaugh, who had evinced a degree of familiarity with Scripture phraseology that no one could have expected, "that yeken the value o' earr-ly lessons learr-ned at a parent's knee. I was rearr-ed in the strictest principles o' United Presbyterianism." His lofty glance and bearing seemed to say, "Behold the result!"

"And when," inquired Tweedie, "will the Curse begin to work?"

Every eye turned upon The MacWaugh, as he carelessly drew out his watch, rather a handsome gold timekeeper, purchased when Luck had knocked as a casual caller at the door of Number Five.

"It is now on the chap of eleven," said The MacWaugh. "Ye may take it that before twalve midnight Billson will be kenning the heinousness o' his sin by the bitterness o' his expiation." His manner was so awe-inspiring, and his eye so coldly exultant, that his hearers were sensible of a chill. Ladislas Smith, Edgeborn, and Millars rose to take leave. Tweedie followed suit, and Karl, still chuckling, shuffled after him. In the cool courtyard, where a breeze from the south-west rustled the dry leaves of the plane-trees, Tweedie asked for a light.

"Dese motches are not very goot!" said Karl, handing the Newcastle man a shabby little box of Tändstickors, and keeping tally as one by one the bad little illuminations that followed the scrape glimmered and died out.

"Flint and steel would be preferable," said Tweedie, throwing down the seventh stump. "Or a burning-glass," he added, "if one were available and it happened to be

day." He had reached the twentieth match and was beginning to be short of patience.

"Or de bow und drill of de Brimitive Man of de past und de Fuegian of de bresent," suggested Karl. "Prut! you haf got it at last. Sometimes I burn von whole box mitout getting a light for my pipe. We always use dose motches in my kontry," he added loftily.

"I understand that the uncertainty lends a certain glamour," said Tweedie, lovingly fostering the creeping spark in the pipe-bowl. "But once you *know* that only one match out of the whole blessed lot will strike, and that one is right at the bottom, the thing must become monotonous!"

"Poot you never do know," explained Karl seriously. "Sometimes dat von motch is at de boddom, odder times at de top, else odder times in de mittle. If dere is choy in ooncertainty, you haf always dat choy. Py de Teufel und his krandmutter!" Karl stopped, with his goloshes planted in the cocoon-shaped pool of light that lay upon the asphalte immediately beneath the archway lamp, "I should be glodd to know whedder dat curse of MacWaugh's was a good motch dat will strike on de box, und flare, or a damt bad von dat will klimmer a liddle, und stink a liddle, und go out pif! Ho, ho!" Karl's portly waistcoat was convulsed with merriment. "Ven I dink of him I loff. Poot if dere vas any goot in dat curse, Pillson vould not loff, poot cry!"

"It would be a crying pity," observed Tweedie, "if Billson did not." Perhaps a shadow flickered on the eyelid of the Newcastle man; and Karl was deceived into the conviction that Tweedie winked, as he added, "You have heard *me* bear testimony to the dynamic power of MacWaugh's will. Well, take it from me that Billson is going to!" This time Tweedie really winked.

"Speak we a liddle lower," said Karl cautiously; and as MacWaugh's colossal shadow moved across the illuminated expanse of his studio window, and a bellowed stave of "Annie Laurie" broke the silence of the night, the white head of the venerable German and the sandy bullet of Tweedie were laid together to conspire. Then retreating footsteps sounded in the tunnel-like brick passage that leads to the outer world.

Tweedie had arranged to look in again at North-West Studios upon the following evening, and Karl awaited his reappearance in such a fever of suspense that the strongest Cavendish lacked flavour in his pipe, and herring-salad with sour cream and sweet cucumbers failed to appeal to his Teutonic palate.

"Vy does he not komm?" the German muttered for the hundredth time as the shades of evening closed in again. He dragged out his battered elbow-chair and planted it and himself in it upon the threshold of his studio, and sat there smoking as the dusky-red sunset faded. Millar's banjo tinkled in the distance; Edgeborn's refined and gentlemanly tenor, supported upon a strong foundation of piano accompaniment, fitfully wooed the inattentive ear; and The MacWaugh patrolled the courtyard, his huge hands driven deep in his baggy tweed pockets, his eyes travelling idly over the dusty asphalte, his pipe gripped between his teeth, its red bowl glimmering in the dark like a Cyclopean eye.

He halted near Karl as an infant's shriek, instantly echoed by another, sounded from the upper floor of the porter's lodge, and a series of smacks of astonishing vigour and loudness, followed by sobbing roars and strangling whoops, betokened that Mrs. Kitt was putting her children to bed.

"It is the evening sacrificee," said The MacWaugh, indi-

cating the chamber of torture with the stem of his old burnt pipe. "The Massacre o' the Innocents," he murmured, as the crimson and indignant face of Mrs. Kitt, illuminated by the flare of a tallow candle, appeared for an instant at the window ere the casement shut with a bang. "What a wife that woman-body wad hae made to Herod! Lauch as ye will, ye pachydermatous auld sinner, I canna bear to hear her beat the bairns."

"*Schonerhaft!* poot de liddle dings haf already forgoden!" said philosophic Karl. "Listen—dey loff," and as the shut casement was stealthily reopened by a small, rebellious hand, a confirmative chuckle responded from overhead. "Und deir mutter has her hands full mit dem, in especial dat young sgoundrel of a boy. He is biting her last night, *ach, ja!* like some liddle vild cat, she is telling me choost now. Und if you haf so mucht gompassion to spare," said cunning Karl, "vy do you not gif some of it to dat poor peggar, Pillson, on whom you haf called down all de plagues of Chob. Py Yove! I would not for a tousand pounds be in Pillson's preeches. Supposing dat curse of yours to be not all tomfoolery *und kindchenspiel!*" added Karl, as footsteps known to him sounded in the brick tunnel-way, and Tweedie's small dapper figure came towards them in the dusk. His footfalls upon the asphalte had a foreboding beat. He came silently up, and halted without speaking.

"Man, what is the matter wi' ye, that ye walk like an undertaker an luik like a sick ghost?" The MacWaugh said, with a quaver of apprehension that he could not master. "Oot wi' it, guid or bad, that ye have come to say?"

Tweedie made a deprecating gesture with his hand. He was certainly pale, or seemed so in the gray, uncertain light, and he wore a nervous grin.

"Believe me, Waugh, I had no desire to annoy you," he said; "rather the reverse. Frankly"—he looked anything but frank at the moment—"knowing, as I do, how ill-will on your part can be manifested"—he stopped to moisten his lips and breathe through his nose—"I should prefer to conciliate. And I hope you will receive what I am about to tell you," he gulped, "in good part."

"Prut!" snorted Karl, "vat is all dis?"

But Tweedie did not seem to hear him. By this time Millars had joined the group, and one or two other men. But Tweedie did not appear to observe them. His soul sat up in his eyes and begged like a dog as it looked at The MacWaugh. And The MacWaugh answered:

"Tell what ye have to tell, Tweedie, man, or for ever after hauld your——"

"No!" cried Tweedie. The sharp yelp of his utterance was taken up by the courtyard echo. "Don't! I—I won't have it." He was wild and shaking. "I've done nothing to you that you should play that game on me. That devil's hanky-panky you played when you cursed Billson!" Tweedie's hand, clenched in defiance, upraised in entreaty, was in the air. He sputtered in his deadly earnestness.

"Havers!" snorted The MacWaugh. If secret terrors plucked at him, he showed as little trace of these emotions as a man carved in stone. "Billson sits safe amang his household gods. His horr-n is exalted," said the Scotchman, "an' it is no' for me to cast it down. I hae naething to do wi' Billson ava."

"You can't deny it! You daren't deny you cursed the man. I—all of us heard you," shrieked Tweedie. "And oh! good lord! *I've seen him.*" A fit of shuddering seized him, he leaned against the wall, and a susurrus of horror went through the semicircle of listeners as he gasped: "It was early this morning. Something drove me to that

studio of his in Kensington. I'd scarcely an excuse; I hardly know Billson. But I knocked at that garden door with the grating in it. It didn't seem odd that nobody answered, at first, because Billson is an eccentric sort of bachelor and lives alone, except for the housekeeper—and she's a hundred. And I waited until she seemed a hundred and one, and then I heard a hollow kind of groaning, and I prodded my penknife into the little wooden shutter that goes behind the grating in the garden door—and moved it aside." He mopped his streaming forehead with his hand-kerchief. "And I looked in and saw Billson—squatting in pyjamas on a pile of smashed crockery in the middle of the gravel-path, scratching himself, with a jagged piece of broken china palette, and gibbering."

"*Potztausend!*!" ejaculated Karl. "For vy did he sgratch und chibber?"

"All over boils!" said Tweedie with a groan. A fresh fit of shuddering seized him; his eyes rolled, sickly, and reproachfully, upon the gaunt, immovable MacWaugh. "What did you do it for? You—you might have spared him." His voice broke and faltered. "Such degradation is too horrible!" And other voices echoed "Horrible!" For Tweedie's rendering of fear and disgust was remarkably clever for an amateur, and had by this time drawn a full audience. Even Plashwater had joined the crowd that hummed about Karl's door.

"Man, ye are daft!" said The MacWaugh shakily. His face was gray and haggard; his eyes had sunk to the bottom of caverns suddenly dug. "Daft or lying," he added, but the dank drops that started on his rugged brow belied his assertion of incredulity. "And if ye are not, what have Billson's boils to do wi' me? I laid nae stress on boils that I remember ava!"

But here there was a chorus of contradiction. Boils had

figured in the inventory, it was conclusively proved, as well as other things which even now might be in course of delivery by Billson's Fate, carriage paid, at Billson's door. Debate ensued; the question was thrashed out and decided. Somehow or other, the doubtful gift of cursing had come down to The MacWaugh, an inheritance from those Highland ancestors of whom he was prone to boast. The ill-wish and the evil eye of Caledonian legend had a share in this modern tragedy. Between Mac This or Mac That, ancient blood-enemy of the house of MacWaugh, sitting upon the cinders of his twelfth-century castle, and Billson on his heap of crockery sherds, in the front-garden of his Kensington studio, the spider-web of connection was spun close and fine. And then Millars, taking the cue from Tweedie, recalled the affair of the hired motor-car, regarded up to the present as an extraordinary bit of bad luck, and not hitherto numbered among the phenomena of occultism.

"Toch ! Keep it up, Millars ! Dinna fear to blaw me; I can stand a guid deal o' flattery," said The MacWaugh bitterly. "I am no' denying that as yourself an' Edge-born went snorr-ting out o' the courtyard in that Guid-forsaken auto-perambulator ye had hired for the day, I lifted up my voice an' cried; 'Gang up, ye Elijahs, in your fiery chariot !' But because there is a hitch in the driving-gear, an' a doited fule callant wi' a skinful o' malt liquor sets himsel' to luik for a leak in the petrol-tank wi' a lighted match, am I responsible for the result ?" His gaze travelled round the circle of faces. "Toch !" he said, after a pause, "there is conviction in every ee. Speak up, Plashwater. Was it no' my doing when Rickford's carr-ter put his jolter heid through your 'Dancing Bacchante' ? Did I no' contrive to bring a fall o' soot down the chimney o' your painting-room when ye were drying your 'Cleo-

patra' against the fire? Speak, you man o' bile, an' say you ken I did!"

"Mrs. Plashwater did remark, when the accident occurred," admitted Plashwater, who made no statement without authority, "that it was a most extraordinary coincidence your having said, only a moment before, that no living man had ever painted Cleopatra *black* enough, and that, had you your way, she should be represented as sooty as a negress."

"Sooty as a——Toch! Ye are richt, Plashwater; I said the worr-ds." The MacWaugh, overburdened by the weight of general testimony, was beginning to break down.

"Und den," put in old Karl, who had sat with his cooling pipe supported on his knee, waiting for an opportunity, "dere was de liddle affair of de blackbirds."

"Of the blackbirds, ye snowy-haired auld reprobate!" said The MacWaugh.

"Schwerlich! Dere are a pair of dem dot build in de vine dat creeps up my back," Karl explained—"I vould say de back of my studio—und deir vistle-piping I lofe, poot not so MacWaugh. It is two weeks ago—de seventeen of dis mont' of Chuly. Dey are in kreat song—dose birds—for I have fed dem on my scraps all de vinter through, and dey pay me in the only coin dey haf. . . . I sit und listen to dem in my karden, I forget I am in England—I am dreaming of anodder gountry—ven in like a mad bull comes pellowing MacWaugh. He swears—dam! und orders me to stop de birds. He cannot keep his mind to his krand new gomposition mit dat vistle-piping in his head. 'Himmel!' he cry. 'Shall de vorld be robbed of a klorious masterpiece for de kratification of a so ancient Sybarite as you?'" Karl's waistcoat quivered and his spectacles gleamed, but his face was grave, and he continued: "I beg Waugh to be patient. In a little dose birds vill haf

arranged deir family affairs und cease to sing, but no ! he vill haf no patience. He shakes his big fist like a matman, und curses dose poor birds from deir piping throats to de last quill-feather of deir tails. Myself, I komm in for some liddle of vat is going, ach, yes ! Und since," said Karl very solemnly, "I haf not been vell. Dere is pains here," he laid his hand upon his capacious waistcoat, "dat I haf not before de kooseberries are ripe. MacWaugh may not be blame for dem. . . . But, py de Teufel und his krand-mutter ! dose blackbirds haf not vistled since. Dey are dumb as Death !"

"To walk the world wi' calamity under ae oxter an' pestilence an' sudden deith under the tither," said The MacWaugh, "micht mak' an orr-dinary human creature as prood as Lucifer. To feather a curr-se wi' scorn, barb it wi' hate an' send it singing forth to smite an enemy hip an' thigh—there is a cerr-tain grandeur in that. But to mak' a bonfire o' a motor-car freighted wi' fules, or gie the pip to a throstle—letting alane the bringin' o' boils on Billson—Toch ! that the possessor o' a will should bend his pooer to the accomplishment o' sic contemptible an' pitiable ends—ye cannot seriously believe o' me, nor will I credit it o' mysel'. As for Tweedie's story, I am ganging to luik into the truth o' it for mysel', " said The MacWaugh. "For to lose a nicht's rest for the sake o' a creature sae infeenitely despicable wad be to forr-feit my respect for Robert Waugh. Cab !" he cried, as a rumble of wheels and a pull-up announced that a vehicle had stopped at the outer gate. Then he vanished.

Before his heavy running footsteps ceased to echo in the tunnel, before the retiring sound of the wheels announced his departure, a flight of questions converged towards one target—Tweedie ! He had been humbugging—simply humbugging, about Billson and the crockery-heap. There

were no pyjamas, and the boils were all poppycock and bumblepuppy. Millars, Karl, and Plashwater sought credit to themselves for having played up to the artist so cleverly. And Tweedie owned to the charge of unveracity, admitting, amidst Karl's gleeful chuckles, the previous night's conspiracy with the venerable German, and describing how, shortly after the hour of twelve, he had called at Billson's Kensington studio to induce him to join in the hoax. But Billson was not in the genial mood. A joke, even at the expense of the hated MacWaugh, had lost flavour for Billson—Billson having developed, previously to Tweedie's arrival, a full-blown attack of German measles.

Over the listening assemblage a silence fell. Tweedie, looking for more compliments upon his dramatic display, met eyes pregnant with the conviction that he had not been acting.

"German measles!" remarked somebody, very softly.

"It is a damt odd goincidence," said Karl, pushing up his spectacles and rubbing his nose doubtfully.

"Even odder than that about the blackbirds!" said Millars.

"Prut! Tomfoolery und *kindchenspiel*!" snorted the old man. "Dat was no goincidence at all!" But Karl was unconvincing.

To a late hour the quadrangle was dotted by groups of awe-stricken and low-whispering men. When at last they retired, lights burned long behind the big windows.

Later, The MacWaugh returned, grim and haggard under a borrowed hat, but relieved in spirit. Cowed by the consciousness of imputed responsibility, he had not ventured to ring Billson's studio bell, or even to peep through the Billsonian wicket. But he had pumped the chemist's boy, who came with draughts, and he had seen the doctor's carriage stop at Billson's door. He had

ventured to buttonhole the man of medicine, and had heard that Billson was down with German measles, also that the disease requires seven days to incubate before it develops. This piece of information was the life-belt that had lifted the head of The MacWaugh above the waters of guilt. That Tweedie should have lied, he said, was to be expected of Tweedie. He could afford to smile, now, over the crockery heap and the pyjamas. But one insurmountable fact—that Billson's rash had broken out before midnight—hovered about the head of the Scotchman like a persistent mosquito, and drew blood at every sting ! MacWaugh would have died rather than own, even to himself, that he had patrolled the courtyard of North-West Studios from the mirk of midnight until cock-crow, trying to reverse the engines and take the curse off Billson. . . . He suppressed all exultation upon hearing in the course of the following day that his enemy was steadily improving. As the improvement continued, the popular belief in the thaumaturgical powers of The MacWaugh faded, and men ceased to treat him with respect and repay loans he had forgotten. Then Billson got well, and went to Belgium for change of air.

And then the intelligence of Billson's death was cabled home, the R.A. attached to Billson's name entitling him to the melancholy distinction of an obituary quarter-column. Visiting, in company with a party of Cook's tourists, the remarkable Cave of Naulette, on the banks of the Lesse, in Namur, Billson had been entombed in one of the blind galleries opening from the central cavern by a slide of gravel débris.

"I am no' a releegious man," said The MacWaugh, in confidence to Karl, "but I could fin' it in my hairt to gang down on my twa knees an' thank the Lorr-d for the way o' Billson's ending. Toch !" He expanded his massive

chest with a great inhalation of relief. "Ye will never ken how I have dwelt in terror o' the creature's deein' on a bone-heap. It wad have proved that I had nae power to take awa' the curse—supposing I had been able to tack ane to the tail o' him. . . . But my mind is clear o' Billson, an' my hands are clean o' his bluid. Let us hope," said The MacWaugh grimly, "he is now studying angels from the life in a better world than this!"

"Und drawing dem mit bones," the old German added, mindful of the errors of the departed artist in the anatomical line. It was the thirtieth of August, and the friends were sitting in Karl's little garden. "Hoosh"—Karl held up a warning finger—"Keep quite still, und you will hear someding."

"Someding" was the rich fluty piping of the male blackbird.

"O sweet!" he sang, from the topmost branches of a poplar. "O! sweet! O! joy, joy, joy!"

"It vos all a choke about your cursing putting dem to silence on de seventeent' of Chuly," said Karl, with a genial jogging waistcoat. "From dat date oontil de close of August de blackbird does not sing—vere are you going?"

For The MacWaugh had risen up in haste, oversetting a stand of pot-plants.

"I am gangin' to bid Millars an' the lave come an' hear. I am weary o' being treated," said The MacWaugh, "wi' the delicate unobtrusive courtesy that is usually accorded to an inferr-nal machine. I am gangin' to prove to them that I canna curse worth a bawbee."

He went. Karl rose presently and shuffled into his studio. He climbed heavily upon a stool, and reached from a shelf a well-known German work upon palæontology, and turned to a chapter descriptive of the famous caves of Namur. With his spectacles askew and gleaming,

and his knotted forefinger heralding his eye along the lines of crabbed characters, he read the paragraph he sought.

“ *Allemachter!* ” he said. “ It is more dan sdrange ! In de Trou, de bones of de mammoth, rhinoceros, bear, horse, lion, hyena, reindeer, and chamois, togedder mit fragments of de human osseous sdrugdure, are in vast quantities found. It is a charnel of remains. So dat Pillson, who could not draw de bones, has died upon a bone-heap after all ! ”

But he did not tell The MacWaugh.

ON THE HONEYMOON

“ ‘Notre oncle Jean est mort la-bas,
Je n’ chant’rai pas, je n’ chant’rai pas.’

“ *VITE, mon p’ti !* ”

With a flick of the whip, the driver thus apostrophised the old white cob that drew the quaint little hooded carriage—a kind of magnified bath-chair peculiar to Guernsey—high in the front of which his bronzed, robust person was elevated on a little wooden perch.

“ Dull enough, this couple behind me,” thought the singer, “ to have been married a dozen years.”

Yet they were bride and bridegroom. Three days since they had landed from the Southampton steamer, and, after breakfasting at the hotel, had driven to Whitegates, the beautiful old manor-house, with its high gables and mulioned windows smothered in wealth of autumn roses and vines of crimson and gold.

Little was known about them, save that He was an English officer—of cavalry, Baptiste, the hotel-porter, had pronounced upon a glance at him, noting the long, swinging stride, the erect carriage, the cut of the fair moustache, the gray tweed suit and black necktie. Baptiste had kissed three of his fingers when he spoke of her. So girlish, so fair, so musical in speech, so exquisite in grace of figure, in tint of skin, in the crystalline clearness of her eyes. Both were used to the sea, it was plain. No dolours, no groans had marred their wedding voyage. And how they laughed and talked and attacked the breakfast ! He—the driver—had pulled up under the open window at which they ate their meal. Their gay voices made him look up wistfully, and she saw him.

"Oh, darling, do let us drive up to the house in that quaint little box on wheels!" she had said. "The driver looks so ruddy and pleasant, and I love the way he talks to that little old white pony!"

And she had had her way. The imperials, portmanteaux, and dress-baskets, all shining with the glossy newness of the honeymoon, had gone on ahead with the Whitegates brougham, while the bride and bridegroom, tucked into the bath-chair-like vehicle drawn by Cheri, the broken-kneed white cob, had followed with less speed. How they had laughed, and that was only three days ago! Now, they were being rattled along together side by side behind Cheri, who was making quite a record performance up the sandy hills and down again.

The air had an exquisite wild freshness; the sky was intensely blue, dappled with lamb-like white clouds that the fresh, keen wind was shepherding to the north-east; the cliffs were golden with broom, purple with heather, scarlet with the wild fuchsia, and warm with the strong sunshine that spread such a feast of colour for the eye, that shot the fierce green surges with streaks of white and purple, and brought out the rich crimson and yellow of the lichens on the rocks. And both as silent as the dead. Only married three days, and making no better use of the time the *bon Dieu* had given them together than to quarrel! He—the driver of the broken-kneed white cob—and Nanette had known better than that. *Biau!* Let gentlefolks be fools—the poor knew better wisdom! He struck up again—

"'Au jardin d' mon pere—
Oh ! vive l'amour !
Un oranger il y'a !
Vive la la la lauriere !
Un oranger il y'a !
Vive la rose de damas !
Vive ——!'"

"Would you be good enough to make a little less noise?"
The cold voice brought the singer to a shamed silence.

"*Noise!*" Thank Heaven, Nanette was not there to hear!

"Why, certainly, M'sieu!" he stammered, looking shamefacedly over his shoulder and blushing from his clean collar to the rim of his old straw hat. "If Madame objects——"

Madame now spoke, very clearly and steadily, her blue eyes shining very large in the small face that was quite colourless under the brim of her own charming hat: "I like it. I never said that I objected. Please go on."

"Oh—if you wish it, by all means," said Monsieur.

But there was no more singing.

A zigzag carriage-road, descending from the upper cliffs to the level of the beach, presenting itself for negotiation, the aggrieved husband of Nanette got down from his perch and walked by the old cob's head.

"Where does this lead?" called out Monsieur, rather roughly.

"Boequaine Bay," came back, rather gruffly.

"What is to be seen there, please?" came from Madame; and the fine bronzed face looked eagerly round.

"The island of Brehou, if the tide admits of our passing the causeway, Madame."

Madame said: "There are the ruins of a monastery on Brehou and a holy well, I believe?"

"The island used to be a very holy island, if Madame excuses. There were saints there first, and then saints' bones; and passing vessels used to dip their sails as an act of reverence, in the old days when people reverenced things, Madame. If the tide admits of our passing the causeway, Madame will see for herself."

"And if the tide does not serve?"

"There is the Creux des Fées."

"The Faries' Cave. Are there really any fairies in Guernsey?"

"One, at least, Madame; a very beautiful one!"

An admiring flash of the fine brown eyes set in the ruddy face of the driver pointed the compliment. Madame's wild-rose face flushed a little. She glanced aside at Monsieur. He was leaning back with folded arms, smoking a cigarette, his soft, gray felt hat tilted over his handsome, rather rigid profile; his eyelids drooped in contempt, it seemed to her. A cold, swift pang went to her heart. That he could seem—could be so indifferent, and upon the third day of their wedded life! Her lip quivered as she looked out in imagination along a perspective of Arctic days spent by the glacial side of a frozen husband, forgetting that volcanic fires may seethe and glow under an icy crust. But the bottom of the zigzag carriage-road had been reached, the last angle was turned, and the bay spread before the vision; green and white rollers close upon narrowing sands, the causeway connecting the gray-green bulk of Brehou with the mainland, a thing for dim conjecture.

"*Ma fe!* The tide's a high one. But we have the Creux here at a few minutes on the right. If Madame were a Catholic, she would make the sign of the Cross before entering, to keep off evil influences, charms, and the like. Do I believe the Creux is haunted? *Je me crais? Nannin, nannin gia!* Not I. It is old talk, that is all." The driver turned back the flap of the double bath-chair—one has no other name for the vehicle—and Monsieur, getting grimly out, assisted Madame to descend. "Without a fond look or a squeeze of the hand. *Ah bah!*" muttered the driver; "some people are hard to please."

And he turned the old white cob to graze on a patch of short, sweet grass growing at the foot of a huge boulder as Monsieur and Madame approached the cave. It was not a

natural cave—not properly a cave at all, being a Druidic structure within an enclosing tumulus feathered with sea poppies, bents, and snapdragons, and hung with blackberry vines. The narrow entrance, facing eastwards, was no wider than a coffin. Madame entered first. The chamber smelt damp and cold and salt, and seemed full of shadows and the booming of the sea. She shivered.

“*Biau!*” said the driver, as the slight figure, with its delicately hued, fluttering draperies, disappeared. “She has entered first. She will be the first for death. The old gobbler will have a sweet mouthful.”

Now Monsieur and Madame were standing in the dark outer chamber of the Druid’s house. The only light came from behind them, through the narrow entrance that looked east. The iron constraint that had weighed upon them all day, the embarrassment that had fettered their limbs and paralysed speech, weighed lighter in the darkness.

Monsieur found voice to say—

“Ethel, for Heaven’s sake forget that letter. Doubt me no more; let us be happy, as we were yesterday—as we have been for months. Upon my soul, I have never regretted——”

“Don’t!” The word came in a sob; he could hear her anguished breathing, and catch a glimmer of whiteness that was her face. “Oh! it has been so horrible! This morning, when I found that letter on the floor of your dressing-room——”

“It was inexcusable of me to drop it!” he broke out. “How could a man risk his life’s happiness by such a piece of carelessness?”

“I am glad that you were careless,” she said, “I am glad that I know the truth. Of course, I thought the letter was mine. The handwriting was so alike—Alice and I always joked about being able to forge one another’s names—and

I always use that ribbed paper and write with violet ink. It never occurred to me that the letter wasn't mine. Sisters oughtn't to write so much alike. It's intolerable!" Her voice quavered off into a silly little laugh.

The man's voice came back through the darkness.

"It's intolerable! Odious! Who could have dreamed of such a thing happening? The truth is, I'd forgotten all about the letter. I was happy—you'll never believe it—too happy to remember anything about the past. It was clean wiped out."

Her voice said—

"You're trying to be kind. That's the sting of it; and, when I thought I was so condescending as to bless you with my hand in marriage, you were marrying me out of pity! Out of pity—because you loved my sister Alice, and she had said to you, 'Ethel adores you. She will die if you don't stoop to her and lift her up from where she is lying at your feet. I love you, too; but I am stronger. I have always given up things to her. Now I give up You!' And it was all in the letter, dated the week before you asked me to be your wife—the letter I found and thought one of my own that you had treasured up. One feels no delicacy about reading a letter of one's own; that was why I looked inside. And then—Oh! I know what it means to fall down out of Heaven into Hell! And when you came in and found me, I blurted everything out. It was never my knack to hide things—not even my love for you. Oh! you have injured me—wronged me, you and Alice between you. I shall always see her face between us, with wistful eyes that speak of her sacrifice. She is going to be a Sister of Charity, she says. Now I know why!"

"Let her!" The man's voice was rough and angry. "If you think I shall break my heart—I tell you, I love you better than any woman alive! I tell you——"

She covered her ears. He could feel, though he could not see, the action. "Oh, *don't!*" she said, shudderingly. "Don't you guess that it is *awful* to me—awful to know you capable of changing so? In a way, I am dear to you. I'm pretty, and young, and fresh. But when I am no longer so, or even years before there is any alteration, and some other woman comes by—"

"Have done!" he said, fiercely. "Why do you torture me and wring your own heart? Why can't you make the best of things?"

"As you do? No," she said, with a hollow little laugh. "I can't. Oh! last night—only last night—we were looking at the moon from the terrace at Whitegates. You said it was like a golden cup, brimmed with sweetness for your lips and mine. Well, the golden cup is upset and all the honey has been spilled."

"Monsieur! Madame!" The voice of the driver came through the narrow entrance, which his sturdy figure blocked. "There is one thing I forgot me! It is the wishing-stone in the middle of the chamber within. The top is hollow, like a little holy-water basin, and who can throw a pebble in, in the darkness, in three tosses gains a wish. Monsieur and Madame might try; *mai grand doux*, they have not many wishes unfulfilled."

The driver's head was withdrawn. There was a brief silence.

"Shall we try?" said the voice of Monsieur.

"It is horrible nonsense, and rather wrong, I believe," said Madame, with a sobbing catch in her breath. But—" Before them glimmered the faint oblong of the entrance to the inner chamber of the tumulus. Monsieur led the way, Madame followed. The inner road was as dark as the outer one. But through a fissure in the roof pierced a faint ray of daylight, and the altar-stone

with the cup-shaped top received this light and held it as though it had been water.

"A pebble. There are plenty underfoot," said He. "Three apiece, as each of us may have three tosses."

He stopped and groped about, and She also searched. In the darkness their hands encountered, and a thrill went from one to the other. But they separated on the instant, and Madame rose up, blushing fiercely, with three little round pebbles in her hand.

"You first!" said Monsieur, and the pebble escaped in the darkness. It flew wide of the stone and chinked against the opposite wall. Again she tried, and this time hit the ceiling. Once more she threw—and the last pebble seemed to vanish without a sound.

"You dear little duffer! I beg your pardon!" He amended. "It's my turn now." A pebble buzzed from his fingers, hit the central stone near the edge, and rolled away into nowhere. He tried again. Failure!

"I don't believe anyone could do it!" said Madame, in a soft, fluttered voice. She had brushed against his sleeve, and the arm it contained had shot out and made her prisoner.

"You're wrong," said He, and drew her with him as he advanced into the centre of the Druid's chamber. Then he bent forwards, making her bend too, and, holding his breath and advancing his thumb and finger within three inches of the cup-topped stone, he gently tossed the third pebble into it. It went to the bottom, with a cool little satisfied rattle.

"Done!" said He. "Now, I wish!"

"Please let me go first!" She pleaded.

"When I have wished," said He, "and not before!"

He drew a deep breath and muttered something. Then he released her, and they came blinking out into the

sunshine together. They conversed on the way home to Whitegates, and the driver sang the song about his Uncle Jean from beginning to end unrebuked.

“ *Bu !* They have made up their quarrel, these two, thanks to the *Fée* of the *Creux* !” he said, and clinked the substantial *pourboire* he had received from Monsieur, as he drove home to his Nanette.

And Monsieur and Madame, silence having again fallen between them like a veil, re-entered Whitegates. On a vast slab of fossil marble in the stately entrance-hall lay a letter addressed to Monsieur. It bore the crest of his regiment of Guards, and was written by his dearest friend. Monsieur threw down his hat and stick and tore the letter open with a sigh. Then a flush rose to his forehead, his gray eyes lightened. He looked for Madame. She was leaning back, very pale and listless, in a carved walnut settle of the Italian sixteenth century, and she might have been some lovelorn lady out of Boccaccio, so wan and fragile did she look.

“ Ethel !”

She looked up.

“ I thought you might be glad to know.... Alice is not going to be an Anglican nun !” said He.

“ Who says so ? Has she—— ?”

Her great blue eyes dilated and darkened. That she was jealous he saw, and his heart leapt at the discovery.

“ She does not write. But the news comes from an authoritative quarter. She is to marry Ferrers, of Ours.”

Her look said, “ Another sacrifice.”

“ I think not,” he said, answering the look. “ Ferrars has succeeded to the Peerage; the old Marquis died upon our wedding day. Strawberry-leaves have seemed better to Alice than the rue you insisted that she must wear. Now, won’t you believe me, and let us be happy ?”

"Oh, what do you want me to believe?" she cried, putting out both hands to keep him off.

"I want you to believe that I have got my wish—that the woman whom I love above all women in the world loves me as I love her," said He.

He knelt at her feet and held her embraced. She looked down into his eyes and knew he spoke the truth.

"Ah! Was that what you asked of the fairies at the Crex?" she whispered, as her cheek rested upon his hair. And then she covered his mouth with her hand, for fear he might say "No!"

THE IDIOCY OF THE MACWAUGH

THE MACWAUGH entertained lofty views upon the subject of friendship. That a man should share his money, meat, and tobacco with his friends, lend them his clothes, pipes, palettes, brushes, oil-tubes, and easels, was to the gaunt Scotchman the first and simplest rule laid down in the primer. And let it be mentioned here, to the everlasting honour of artistic humanity, that his friends were never backward in supplying The MacWaugh with opportunities of observing this rule. If they omitted to discharge their own obligations with equal zeal it was because The MacWaugh was satisfied to lend; it never occurred to him to borrow. Men who were big enough to wear them, wore his clothes—garments slightly out of date in cut and style but bearing the *cachet* of a still fashionable West-End tailor. His studs and sleeve-links had attended countless entertainments to which The MacWaugh had never been asked. His walking-stick went out for constitutionals with countless pedestrians; his mackintoshes and umbrellas kept the rain from wetting everybody but The MacWaugh; his railway rugs and portmanteaux acquired the dust of foreign travel while their owner grew rusty at home; his fishing-rods caught trout in Scotch burns and Norwegian rivers, though the holidayless MacWaugh sweltered through hot Augusts and scorohing Septembers under the baking tiles of Number Five, North-West Studios, or panted in shirt-sleeves and a bamboo chair beneath the parched plane-tree in the middle of the quadrangle.

But the claims of friendship, according to The Mac-

Waugh's simple creed, established right of *saisine* over things other than eatable, drinkable, portable, and wearable. The MacWaugh, whose stark honesty and rigid candour at times made persons of pliant moral backbone slightly uncomfortable in his society—The MacWaugh, in whose rugged bosom the squall of a spanked child or the mew of a hurt kitten would rouse a tempest of furious indignation, and whose immense freckled hand upon occasion was capable of a touch as tender and as light as that of the gentlest woman's—The MacWaugh was of opinion that in the cause of friendship the honest man should not hesitate to burgle, the truthful man to palter with strict veracity, or the humane man to commit bodily violence. He would enlarge in discourse upon this, his pet subject, at the club, or at other men's studios, or in his own, whenever he could get anybody to listen; and, given a select audience and a favourable opportunity, would hold his hearers spell-bound by his eloquence—it being understood that there are short spells as well as long spells. I have known him break chairs in demonstration of this great theory, and even spill whisky upon its way to the lips of another man, as he quoted Damon and Pythias, Pylades and Orestes, Zenothemis and Menecrates, Amis and Amile.

"I will no' shame you," he said, waving his hand superbly, "by allowing ye to be ignorant o' the twa classical instances firr-st named. But tak' the case o' the last but ane. Zenothemis an' Menecrates were twa Marsellais, an' in the Early Classical Age—I will no' be troubling ye wi' the exact date—as Lucian puts it, Menecrates, being a judge o' the local county court, gave an unjust sentence, an' was degradit from office by his indignant countrymen. Maybe, after poking his jokes at some puir woman-body, sued by a piratical dressmaker for payment ower a gown

that didna fit; ea'ing her up to the bench an' twirling her round an' round like a kirk steeple-craw, amid the admeiring ecstasies o' the ushers, the sycophantish chuckles o' the constables, an' the hypocreectical sniggers o' the general public in the body o' the court, the blethering auld eediot had dismissed the maitter wi' a deceesion a bairn o' three nicht have blushed to be guilty o'."

"Get on, old man," said Millars from his corner.

"Toch! I was thinking," said The MacWaugh, "o' an instance I witnessed the last time a gratefu' country summoned me to Albany Street County Court for no' paying the tax upon the income I dinna possess. . . . But, to gang back to the story. . . . Menecrates expired o' a broken hearr-t, which proves him to have been an unnatural kind o' a lawyer. An' being upon his deeing-bed, Zenothemis chapped at the door to ask was there naething he could do for the puir beggar ?"

The MacWaugh paused to suck at his pipe, which gave forth a weird bubbling sound.

"Ought to have looked in before, if he called himself a pal," observed Edgeborn, stroking his cherished Vandyck beard.

The MacWaugh pursued! "'How's a' wi' yoursel' ?' says the perpendicular man to the horizontal ane. 'Hoots!' says Menecrates, 'can you no' be seeing for yourself, ye boss-eyed eediot, that I'm growing to the ground, like a stirk's tail! Being a Pagan,' says he, 'I have nae pressing anxieties about my ultimate destination. But that daughter o' mine gars me yowl in speerit wheneever I think o' her.' 'Say ye sae ?' says Zenothemis. 'Ye have seen her,' says the corpse to be, 'an' weel ye ken she is as ugly as the verra Deevil.' 'Ay,' replies the veesitor, 'the lassie certainly struck me as bearing a most inordinate resemblance to her daddie.' At that Menecrates

grabbed a boot that was lying on the floor, pitched it at his freend's heid, an' instantly gave up the ghaist."

"Und is dat all de story?" asked Karl Voss, who had toddled into Number Five in the dusk hour. "Und vas de liddle girl as ogly as de old man said?"

"Lucian gi'es ye to understand," returned The MacWaugh, "that the perr-sonal uncomeliness o' the puir young creature baffles the pooer o' language to describe. He adds that Zenothemis an' she were ca'ed in kirk upon the sabbath following, an' married before the month was out."

"*Potztausend!*" grunted Karl. "Und for vy did Zeno—I cannot his name remember—make sotch a damt tonkey of himself?"

The MacWaugh brought down his granite fist upon a little table near him with a bang that almost split it. "Because," he said, "the man was her father's freend. Take a later instance o' noble, pure, an' devoted freendship," he continued, sweeping the glasses from Millars' nose with a free, unstudied gesture of his elbow, "in the reign of Pepin o' France. Amis and Amile were twa young knichts that had sworn fealty and fellowship perpetual upon the sword o' the ane o' them, that had a reliquary in the hilt. An' after divers adventures Amile married a countess an' became the father o' twins, an' Amis became a leper. Then ane day the Angel Raphael called on Amile an' explained that if he would be desirous o' curing his freend he had but to draw his sworr-d, an stick the new-born weans that lay sleepin' in their cradle, an' anoint the leper wi' their innocent bluid."

"Und did he kill de poor liddle dings?" asked Karl anxiously.

"The chronicle tells," said The MacWaugh, "that he wept grievously, an' threw himself upon the babes——"

"Den he smoddered dem!" said Karl, "or smoshed dem into pie-paste, und killed dem dat vay."

"Am I telling the story," demanded The MacWaugh, "or are you? Amile did as the Angel said; he sliced up the weans an' cured Amis, an' went down to posteerity as a subleeme example o' the maist devoted freendship."

"He would have hanged upon de kallows as a suplime example of someding else," burst out Karl, "if I had had anyding to do mit him. Do not tell me dat in his blace you would have dose liddle infants *aufschneiden* like piglings, Waugh, because I vill not believe you."

"They came to life afterwards, the pair o' them," said The MacWaugh rather weakly. "If I had been sure they would—beforehand—I doubt I would hae taken a slash at them—juist for the honour o' freendship, ye understand."

"Prut! Tomfoolery *und kindchenspiel!*" snorted Karl. Then he went shuffling out in his great goloshes, and the other men dropped away one by one. And then Rathburn, who shared Number Five in amity with The MacWaugh, confided to the shaggy Scotchman that he had proposed to Cicely Bloss, the young lady student who not long previously had come to live at Number Nine, and that Miss Bloss had accepted him.

The MacWaugh nearly crushed Rathburn's slighter fingers in his giant grip. "Man!" he said, "I congratulate you with all my hairr-t. There is scarcely a sweeter young creature leeving than Artemidora—ye will remember I christened her Artemidora when we saw her firr-st? But ye are baith young, and Art, as a means o' subsistence for a wife, an' maybe a family, is precarious. . . . I am fearing ye will be driven to abandon the loftier plane o' composeetion," said The MacWaugh with a heavy sigh, "an' colour canvas for exhibeetion at the Royal Academy. Toch! there is no knowing how low a young man may sink

under the pressure o' rent an' taxes an' doctor's bills. . . ." He began to stride up and down, knocking over easels and chairs as he cannoned against them, and smoking vigorously. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation:

"Man, Rathburn ! What kind o' fule am I, to be forgetting—You canna marry Cicely Bloss. You're no' free. Did you no' tell me, scarce a year ago——"

"All right ! I say it's all right !" Rathburn cried hurriedly. He stammered in his eagerness to get out the words. "I was mistaken. I tell you it's all square. It wasn't any marriage in law. She—she had a husband living; I had the proof. And, besides, she's dead. Don't I tell you it's as right as rain ? Don't worry !"

The MacWaugh was not given to worrying. He waved his hand and the subject dropped. And he arrayed himself in garments of state upon the following afternoon, and he and Rathburn went over to take tea at Number Nine. The studio, adorned with rather feeble examples of Cicely's skill in flower-painting, was quite crowded. The Plashwaters were there—as the wife of the only Academician in North-West Studios, Mrs. Plashwater exacted a considerable amount of homage—also Millars, and Edgeborn, and Karl Voss. Ellen Angelo, the journalist, with her red hair in a tidier knot than usual, and her green eyes devoid for once of their usually cynical twinkle, came in, with her blue Persian kitten swearing on her shoulder and a votive offering of theatre-tickets in her hand. Brodrick, the war-correspondent, came; and with him Ladislas Smith, the popular designer of impressionistic posters, who had occupied Number Nine until the voice of his success bade him take flight for Holland Gate. With these and other congratulatory callers the studio became overpoweringly crowded, and the hall-door gaped like the valve of a homesick oyster in the window of a Strand fish-restaurant.

And the moment when the voices of the guests were engaged in a general *mélée* of conversation, when the tea-cups clinked loudest and the clouds of cigarette-smoke—Cicely objected to the odour of pipes—gathered thickest under the ceiling sky-light, it was given to The MacWaugh, to uphold his creed of all-abnegating and all-sacrificing friendship by an act of idiocy the most sublime.

For, as I have said, the green-painted, brass-knocked outer door stood open, and the long shadow of an occasional passer-by—a tradesman's messenger or a model in search of employment—made longer by the brilliant glare of the electric arc-lamp suspended to the lower arch of the echoing red-brick tunnel that leads to the thoroughfare beyond; such shadows every now and then would pass, followed by the bodies that had cast them, and momentarily darken the threshold of Number Nine.

But it was a blacker shadow than usual that projected itself inwards and traversed the little hall, dadoed with green Japanese matting and ornamented with cheap Japanese prints. And the individuality to which this shadow pertained was that of a woman—a coarse woman, flaunting and grotesque, with her red-ruddled cheeks and heavily-blackened eyelashes, her cheap feathered hat pinned on over lumps of badly-bronzed hair, and her draggled silks and rusty laces. Ridiculous, from the torn petticoat-flounce, heavy with the mud and dust of the streets, that trailed behind her; and her once smart kid boots, from which the buttons had burst; and yet impressive somehow, with her air of being a woman who could threaten nothing that she would not do; and who had risen, on the fumes of liquor that palpably exhaled from her, superior to every imaginable situation.

This woman, having stumbled along the passage of Number Nine, pushed open the studio door, and the harm-

less revel that was in progress came to an end at her sudden entrance. She stood for a moment breathing defiance and cheap brandy. Then she waved a large hand, covered with a torn and dirty Suede glove through which cheap imitation jewelled rings were bursting, and demanded her husband.

"For he's 'ere, the swine!" she cried, "as married me an' left me—left me, my Gord! to starve or go on the streets, for all 'e cared. Me that set for 'im hour after hour till I was that stiff I couldn't move a finger, me that slaved and worked for 'im till I wore my fingers to the bone. Artises, call yourselves, with your stinkin' oil-tubes and your turpentine?" She hiccupped and swayed a little unsteadily, and straightened her hat with a sudden accession of propriety; and Ladislas Smith, who in pre-famous days had rented the studio before Cicely Bloss, took the opportunity of slipping out unobserved, by the glass-paned door that led into the rearward strip of garden, before the stranger lowered her unsteady, fumbling hands. Then she looked round at the startled women and the silent men, and broke into a peal of raucous laughter. "Lor'! how you all look!" she cried. "One would think it was the Old Gent 'ad dropped in to pay an evenin' call, instead of a pore deserted gal a-lookin' for—" Her manner changed, her eyes flared, a choking screech went out from her, and she staggered forwards and threw herself clumsily upon the neck of Rathburn. Over her wagging plumes the young man's white face stared blankly. He tried to free himself, but the woman held him fast. "My 'usband!" she shrieked hoarsely. "My 'andsome boy, that used me so crool! Oh! didn't you ought to be ashamed to treat your Bella so?"

"You're not my Bella!" snarled Rathburn, struggling with her as she clutched and wailed. He shook with rage

and mortification, and his face was streaked with white and clayey blue. "Waugh—somebody, help ! Take her off, before I—" He choked and spluttered unintelligible things, and presented, as his self-advertised owner clung to him, a pitiable spectacle.

"Toch ! Be reasonable, my guid creature !" began The MacWaugh, advancing to the rescue. The fair intruder dropped Rathburn, who instantly beat a retreat, and turned upon the gaunt Scotchman with heaving bosom and working fingers.

"Lay a finger on me," she cried, "and I'll perish you, you lank-jawed Irisher ! I'll tear your face off ! I'll not leave you with a feature for your mar to know you by. I've beat a p'leeceman before—in a row—and I'll beat you."

The MacWaugh drew himself to his full height, and looked round upon the circle of astonished faces. He saw the white horror of Cicely Bloss's and the gray pallor of Rathburn's before all. And his great Inspiration came upon him, and for a moment his gaunt figure seemed to dilate and expand to twice its proportions. Then he looked at the alcoholic fury with his calm, inscrutable gray eyes, and said : "It is far from decent o' you, Bella, I must say, to be washing your dirr-ty linen in this public way. Conseedering the company ye are in, ye should have mair sense o' propreeity. An' as to the young gentleman ye have laid claim to as your husband, being ony sic relation to ye in law, I will be juist troubling ye to remember that ye were married to me, Roberr-t Waugh, in Scotland, before witnesses, seven years before ye ever clapped eyes on yon lad. Toch !" said The MacWaugh, "ye may weel stare at me as if ye had met a bogie. Little did ye think, Bella, my lass, that ever you and me would foregather again."

"You Finnan haddock !" cried the indignant Bella,

purple-faced and clawing, "I never set eyes on you before in all my blooming life."

"Prut! I believe her!" cried Karl Voss.

But The MacWaugh silenced the German with a stern gesture, and, facing the assembled company, resumed his *Odyssey*. He explained how Bella and he had met, how his wandering and volatile affections had wound themselves around her buxom and then youthful charms, and how after a few years of union, rendered unhappy by his own periodical lapses into intemperance and dissipation, he had basely deserted the woman he had sworn, before witnesses whose names he supplied, to love and cherish. Let it be owned in justice to the offender that he painted his own conduct in the darkest and most sombre shades. Long before he had finished, the woman had collapsed. A dazed and blinking heap, muttering and glaring, in a chair, was all that was left of Bella, and by-and-by she sank into a heavy slumber, broken by fitful hiccoughs, and muttered and glared no more.

"Of course, being noo aroused," The MacWaugh ended, "to a sense o' the enormity o' my conduct in the past, I will from henceforr-th chairge myself wi' this puir creature's support. Ladies and gentlemen, I will bid ye guid evening. Come, Bella!"

The MacWaugh stooped. He roused the frowsy, tousled creature gently and raised her to her feet. As he turned to lead her from the room, he met the wild green eyes of Ellen Angelo, and in that moment might have seen, and seen too late, what he had done; but he went away, leading the sleepy, stumbling castaway, and looking immovably before him with fixed, unseeing pupils and a face that might have been carved in granite. The couple entered Number Five, Rathburn following.

"Good Heavens, Waugh!" he burst out, "what made

you give yourself away like that—empty the whole bag of tricks before Cicely and all of them ? And who would ever have dreamt of your being married !” His glance, as it fell upon the drunken stranger, who was now dozing off the effects of her drink upon the tattered divan, seemed to add: “ *And to that !* ”

“ Toch ! as to being married,” said The MacWaugh, rubbing his rough chin, “ it is a forr-m o’ dissipation I have never yet indulged in. Weel ye ken, man, Rathburn, why I did as I did. For aye thing, my back is broad. Respect-abeelity an’ mysel’ pairted company long ago,” he continued with obvious relish, “ an’ when I thought o’ you being shamed an’ degradit before Cissy, an’ saw her bit white face staring at ye, the notion o’ lending a leg to your credit came to me wi’ a jaup. So I lee’d like a Trojan or a newspaper art critic. . . . An’ for a perr-son totally devoid o’ literary talent,” said The MacWaugh with modest pride, “ I ca’ the lee a guid ane !”

He folded his arms upon his massive chest as Rathburn leaped up and shrieked: “ Great Scott ! You don’t mean to say *all that* was made up ?”

“ Ay !” said The MacWaugh placidly, “ made up when I saw ye vainly tryin’ to luik as though ye never had seen yon creature before in a’ your life.”

“ But I never did see her before in my life !” yelled Rathburn. “ The other—the girl I thought I’d married seven years ago, and found out I hadn’t—was a yellow-haired, blue-eyed, slim—Oh !” He tore his hair. “ And she’s dead; she died at Leicester Infirmary four years ago.” He danced about the studio, he kicked a copper pot before him, he swore; and the woman on the divan slept heavily through it all. And The MacWaugh, stung by the remembrance of that look in Ellen Angelo’s eyes, arrived at the comprehension of his own colossal idiocy.

"Toch!" he said rather ruefully. "If ever a grand lee was wasted, poured out prodigally upon the ground, it will be that. Man, Rathburn, ye will have to explain—No!" he added, after a brief moment of reflection. "I am some fearing ye will not be able to explain, Rathburn, man—nor mysel', if I was needing to." A faint smile touched the rugged lines of his face and lightened in his inscrutable, gray eye as he glanoed at the snoring bundle on the divan. "Toch!" said The MacWaugh, "I am thinking I will be owing a double apology to puir Bella there, when she comes oot o' her drams. It is forr-tunate, Rathburn, man, that neither that young woman—whatever she may be—nor mysel' will be having ower much character to lose. Ye must have obserr-ved yoursel' how easily they a' believed me. Rax me the whisky, like a guid lad, and ring up Kitt to oa' a cab for yon puir creature. Toch!" said the self-immolated martyr in the cause of friendship reflectively, as he knocked out his pipe upon the table. "If I had deleeberately adverteesed mysel' just now as a virr-tuous an' law-abiding citizen instead o' a confounded black-guarr-d, I am some fearing there would no' have been evident sic a general readiness to accept my *bona feedy*."

THE CRUCIAL TEST

THEY were married at St. Judith's, Rahore, Punjab, India, in the middle of the winter season. Their honeymoon was to begin with a fortnight at Hurree, 7,500 feet above the sea, and end up with six weeks of seeing historic places and beautiful things. He would then have to go back to his work on the new line of railway, linking up, by a concession obtained with difficulty from the rulers of a certain native state—a town that had a fort, and a big reservoir, and a Maharajah's palace, and a S.P.G. Mission, but no European society, and a bad reputation for fever in the rains—with the big, bustling traffic of the North-West.

He looked very handsome and unusually well set-up, everybody agreed, for a civilian. She was a dream in a white satin Empire robe, trimmed with pearls, and a Court train covered with old Brussels lace. Her veil was of silk tulle, she had a coronet of orange-blossom, and he owed a frightful bill for the double diamond spray that pinned it on her hair. Still, one doesn't expect to be married more than once, and this was a love match, especially on his side.

They went away together in a sumptuous, white-canopied car, with gazelle-leather linings and solid silver-gilt fittings, lent by a native potentate, who had a knack of doing courteous, pleasant princely kindnesses. She wore a dress of white *crêpe*, with a long boa of filmy plumes, and a marvellous hat of chiffon and blush-roses. His garments were beautiful and new, but not too new or beautiful, and his lovely boots were of Russia leather—too tight, too

lovely ever to be worn again. He sometimes looked at them afterwards, gone mildewed on the trees, and wondered how he had managed to get inside.

There had been one little incident at breakfast—a money-lender's wire had arrived for him, and he had read it and jammed it into his waistcoat pocket, saying, "All right; no answer!" to the white-turbaned, snowily-robed bearer who waited for the word. And then had come the cutting of the cake, and the awful ordeal of hearing your brand-new husband flounder through the morass of verbiage into which a man is led in returning thanks. He had finished ever so long before he had done, and she had been so relieved, when at last he stopped, that she had forgotten to ask him about the telegram.

Now they were in the train, rushing over the iron road. The special reserved compartment *de luxe*, with sleeping-cabins and electric-light, and discreet attendance, was wide and cool; there were plenty of iced things, and fruit and flowers, and the electric punkah, at the pressing of a button, would refresh the air. He was hers and she his for all the rest of their lives together.

And the thing might have turned out quite well in the long run had he not been an imaginative, exacting ass, who had read in novels of women—devoted women—who were put, by men who worshipped them, to crude and painful tests to prove the reality of their love for the men, and who had come through fiery ordeals triumphantly, and lived happy, trusted, and beloved for ever after—in the books.

Why did he do it? Was it the champagne-cup? Was it the confetti down the back of his neck, and the grain of rice that had got into his ear, that made him purr, with his lips touching the sapphire stud in hers—

"You have never asked me about the wire?"

She turned bright eyes lovingly to his and laughed.

"I forgot ! It has been such a whirl. And you got into such a hat over your speech, poor old pet ! and then I had to rush away to change ; and then mother, who hadn't shed a single tear up to then, burst suddenly, and carried away everybody, and all the bridesmaids were fighting for the left shoe, and my waistband had to be taken in about so much !"—she measured off a fraction of pink nail—"and at the last minute it was found that nobody had packed my Red Book. And I shall want it when we get up to Hurree, among the hills, and we visit all those temples, and mosques, and palaces, and all the heavenly things I've been dying to see ever since I came out. And now I'm going to with you ! Oh'h !"

She clapped her bare, pink hands, and nestled luxuriously against his waistcoat, brushing his perfectly-shaved chin with her perfumed hair. Something prompted him, and he spoke, and the house of cards began to totter from that instant, though the roof was not begun even.

" You are going to see them with me, but not yet——"

She drew her breath with a little gasp and looked round at him, and her eyes were narrower than the idiot had thought.

" You're joking, Pippy ?"

He was in deadly earnest to put her to the test and find out how deeply she loved him ; to prove her true—unselfish to the core of her—was his great ideal. He said :

" On the contrary, I am not joking. Don't you remember the telegram that came for me just when you were going to cut the cake ?"

She nodded, her lips a little pale.

" But that did not mean . . . ?"

" It means a deferred wedding-trip—a post-dated wedding-tour for both of us—because the wire was a recall for me."

She half-rose, pulling her waist free of his encircling arm.
“A recall!”

“For me! And for you! For both of us! Something has happened to my second, Murchison. And I’ve got to go back and take the reins.”

Her eyes were big enough now. She stared at him and stammered.

“Aren’t we—aren’t we really going up to Hurree by this train?

He lied again, as those successful liars in the books had lied.

“We would get there—or at least to Jawal-Indi, where one takes tonga for Hurree—if we stopped in this train; but we aren’t going to. We change at Rianwala and travel to Katmari, and there we shall find a white steam transport car to take us ninety miles——”

She gulped.

“Into the wilderness.”

“Where Adam and Eve went,” said this fatuous man, complacently.

“When they were driven out of Paradise . . .” she cried. He had never seen her so tragic and so pretty as when she wrung her hands, crying, “Why—why did you keep this a secret? Why, in heaven’s name, have you only told me now?”

“For one thing, I had other things to think of.”

“How, knowing that you were being dragged back into that Kashmiri desert, could you forget?” she cried with passion.

“I looked at you,” he said, his tones quite low and tender. She stamped her little bronze-shoed foot.

“You looked at me? . . . Why didn’t you give me a chance to look at it—this—hideous prospect that you unfold now?”

What was she saying ? Those women in the books had taken things differently. His house of cards was tottering desperately, but he might have saved it even then.

Tears welled up into the bride's beautiful eyes.

"How could you ? How could you not even tell mother ?"

"I did tell her !" said he, floundering deeper in the bog, and speaking in a deep, manly, determined voice, to reassure his quaking soul.

Her eyes blazed scorn through the tears.

"And she conspired with you to blindfold and deceive me ? *Mother* ? I won't believe it. Not even if it is said by you."

He said, feeling for his cigarette-case, and giving her a lordly but affectionate smile—"I forbade her to mention the matter to you. Your affairs are mine now. Aren't they, little woman, eh ?"

She laughed weakly, with tearful eyes, and nibbled at her filmy handkerchief. Poor, beloved, gentle little soul. The surprise had shaken her, but she was true as steel. The gold in her nature that time retorted in the fire of the Great Test should presently shine forth, and the glory of it would be reflected in her eyes, and he would open wide his arms, saying, after the fashion of those men in the books and in the plays: "Darling—my own true darling—it was only a trick. We shall have the honeymoon and the wedding tour made tenfold more delicious by the knowledge that we are, not only in the flesh, but in the soul—each other's."

She was speaking.

"Perhaps, having at last told me, you will add candour to—candour." Was that irony in her tone ? "For what reason are you suddenly recalled ? Have you—have you done anything—disgraceful ?"

"Done anything?" He stared at her. "Disgraceful? Good God! how can you ask?"

Pity the idiot. He had devised the Test, with the most sublime faith in her, little dreaming to see shattered, at his new tight boots, her boundless faith in him.

"I asked," she said, sitting on the opposite seat, and looking at him curiously, "because if there is any more to know of you"—how strangely she expressed herself, poor little angel!—"I want to know it now."

He tried to turn the conversation.

"Jolly of the Company, wasn't it, to lend me the white Transport car? We can only travel ninety of the hundred and thirty miles in it, but it takes the edge off the journey, doesn't it?"

She answered, picking at the fringe of the seat covering, "I think the edge of the journey has certainly been taken off."

"The forty-odd we're doomed to do in a bullock-tonga," he said, gaily. "Because even a white car can't climb a dry watercourse full of boulders. That's the road, and it goes up—without your meeting anything but a Kashmiri postman or a stray tiger."

He had thought she would have looked at him with a brave, confident smile at his mention of tigers, as much as to say—possibly she *would* say—"Am I not with you?" but nothing seemed farther from her thoughts. He went on:

"And then, when we have climbed twenty miles or so, we come to the rim of a big valley, and Lalagar is down at the bottom of it—fort, and palace, and reservoir, and works—my works!—and beyond, in a half-moon, the eternal mountains capped with eternal snow. The climate, as I have told you——"

"It is hot and moist, with a rainfall of 60 inches." She broke in upon his description with a hysterical laugh. "A

big valley with a half-moon of mountains. Lalagar Fort and Lalagar Palace and Lalagar Reservoir to look at, year in and year out—when I am not contemplating you and your works.” She rose suddenly and writhed her arms about her neck, crushing the filmy boa of plumes—a present of his own—and tore it from her, and threw it on the carriage floor, and cried: “ You—you and your works. What are your works ? Are they lies—lies and falsehoods—like everything else you have built up about me—you who have lied to me and deceived me and duped me on our wedding-day ? Oh, God ! and I have got to live with you and be a part of you all my life ! How shall I bear it ? How shall I bear it ?”

Down went the house of gilded cards in ruin at his feet. He knew, even as he tried to take her in his arms and she fought with him, pushing him back, leaning away, writhing to be free of his touch, of his vicinity—he knew that nothing would build it up again any more. But he tried. Despite her anguished repulsion of him, he told her that it had been all a trial—a planned test; that she had come through it with flying colours—he lied again in saying that; and that there would be a honeymoon and a tour, and a devoted, worshipping slave of a husband all through it, who begged her to kiss him and look like her old sweet self, and have the tea he felt she must be wanting; wouldn’t she let him ring and tell Ram Lao to get it—that cup of tea.

She assented, to stem his intolerable tide of prattle, and sat on the opposite seat, thinking while the tea was being got. Presently she said, looking over at him strangely :

“ We change, don’t we, at some junction for Jawal-Indi and Hurree ?”

“ At Tala Musa Junction,” he told her, relieved to see her coming round to her sweet old happy self again.

“ Would you mind,” she asked in a furtive, whispering

way, looking at him out of the corners of her eyes, "would you mind taking the return train at Tala Musa, and going back to Rahore?"

"Do you really wish it, Pansy?" He sat and stared. Then he patted the seat beside him, indulgently, and told her to come and be scolded for a silly little darling child. As though he should dream for an instant of foregoing the longed-for honeymoon among the hills at Hurree!

The woman came over and sat beside him. Her agitation had left her, and she was very still and very pale. She called him Philip now. Never did he hear her say Pippy again—always Philip. She submitted to his petting, rose when the turbaned, badged attendant came with the tea, and poured it out, not forgetting that he liked two lumps of sugar. And she drank hers without emotion as the express raced on and on. They changed at Tala Musa and left Jawal-Indi by tonga before the snow-capped Kashmiri Mountains had flushed with the rose of dawn.

But there would be no honeymoon for either of them. Both of them were perfectly, hideously clear on that point. And both of them were right.

THE POWER AND THE GLORY

WE used to think it hard that the man—highly-strung, sensitive, gifted creature that he was—should have such an unsympathetic wife.

I fancy I see her now, upon the first night's performance of one of his plays, sitting in the proscenium corner of the stage-box, immobile, expressionless, rigid, following the action of every scene; noting the looks and gestures of the actors with keen, observant eyes; listening with a cold, critical attention to every tone-inflection; sometimes indicating displeasure with a twitch of the lips or a faint curve of the nostril, or approval with a nod; never betrayed into an open, hearty, womanly manifestation of enthusiasm in her husband's work.

Now the work was good work, virile and strong, and yet full of sweetness and tenderness. As a delineator of feminine character especially, no one could equal Ravill. He had wonderful insight into the mysteries of the nature of woman, and played wild harmonies upon her heart-strings, which set the world a-weeping sometimes, or other times dissolved it in the tears that are born of mirth.

Ravill was no boaster, but he knew his worth. His wife's lack of appreciation of him and his great gifts caused him secret suffering. He sometimes hinted as much to a few intimate friends at the Club, and I have known him—emotional child of genius that he was—moved to tears. I have seen him smite his finely-modelled brow with his clenched fist, hard; and tear his curls—slightly grizzled but still hyacinthine—quite violently.

"When others crown me," I have known him say, "she has not one leaf of laurel—not a withered leaf—to bring me."

The sympathy of admiring friends was his consolation. If he did stray now and then in search of subtler solace, we were not disposed to condemn him. A man misunderstood and unappreciated, Mrs. Ravill set no value on the myrrh and frankincense, the gold and jewels, of his rich nature. If other women did we were as little disposed to blame *them*. We took it as a proof of Ravill's sweetness of disposition that he always went back to his wife after one of his periodical lapses from the stereotyped path of connubiality. The coldness of *her* disposition was well illustrated by her unmurmuring reception of the gifted prodigal. If she had set more store by him she would have made a scene or a series of scenes. It was plain that she—did not care. What on earth had made him marry her?

She was not handsome. There were too many contradictions in her for beauty. She was too squarely built for elegance, for one thing. She had deep, observant eyes—eyes whose regard was strong and unwavering. She had a strongly-marked forehead, and strong lips, and a strong throat, and with these characteristics her delicate little ears and fragile hands and feet were oddly at variance. She looked like a woman with a powerful individuality, and she had not got one. That alone would have made her disappointing, even if one had not happened to be aware of the crass want of artistic appreciation which poisoned the cup at Ravill's domestic banquet.

I remember one night—a night of triumph for the playwright—when the bitterness of Ravill's soul broke forth in words. The curtain had fallen upon the Third Act; the tumult of the house's appreciation beat upon our ears like

the sound of the waves of the sea. There had been a call for the actors; there had been two calls. There had been a demand for the manager, who had responded in faultless evening-dress and accents broken with emotion. To shrieks for the scene-painter had succeeded a universal outcry for the author. The pit rose at Ravill when at length he appeared. I, his friend, was proud of him—proud for him; and in the exultation of the moment I looked in his wife's eyes for an answering gleam of pride. But they were as lustreless as onyx, and the lips, which should have softened with a smile, were set in sphinx-like immobility.

And then Ravill burst into the box, flushed and panting, and threw himself into his armchair behind the curtain. Of my presence he seemed oblivious, addressing himself, pointedly and brusquely, to his wife.

“Isn’t it good?” he burst out. “Don’t you think it has gone off well? Aren’t you pleased?”

“You know,” returned Mrs. Ravill, “that I am pleased.”

“Look pleased, then!” said Ravill with heat. “There’s not a woman in the house, rich or poor, who wouldn’t give her ear-rings, and her ears as well, to be in your place to-night.”

“Possibly,” his wife assented quietly. “And not a man, it may be, who would not choose, if choice were given him, to be in yours.”

At this Ravill, whose manner to his wife in public was usually distinguished by its chivalrous courtesy, ground his teeth and swore quite savagely. Immediately recalling the fact of my presence, he looked ashamed. In my heart I exonerated the man. Whether she cared for him or not, she might have added one breath to the gale of enthusiasm under which the very walls of the theatre were rocking. Why couldn’t she love her genius? Why couldn’t she be

proud of him ? Was it that she was jealous of his great gifts, envious of his fame ?

Poor fellow ! She was to blame for much—for all. I went behind the scenes with Ravill presently—Mrs. Ravill preferring to drive home without delay—and witnessed the unaffected grace with which he received the congratulations that were heaped upon him. He introduced me to the Zanouka. She had sustained the principal part of the play with wonderful grace, with unflagging power and convincing passion. And when I told her so, “Who could help acting,” she murmured, “with such ideas to unfold, such words to speak ?”

She had a deep, vibrating voice and a serpentine figure. Her complexion was bad by daylight, but then she had ropes of wonderfully bronzed hair. True, her nose was not much—but then her eyes ! Treacle-wells for depth and sweetness. Before I could count twenty Ravill had plunged—plunged impetuously and conclusively.

The new play filled the theatre treasury to bursting and repleted the pockets of the lucky author; but the Zanouka was insatiable. That large mouth, those long fingers and great eyes were greedy of gold. She possessed a wonderful faculty for making mean men generous, and Ravill, with whom lavishness (where others were concerned) had never until now been a prominent characteristic, bled pretty freely at the urgent lips of this fascinating vampire. He was nearly cleaned out—that was the fact.

“Write another play !” commanded the Zanouka, “with a big part for *me* in it.”

She favoured him with a brief but succinct synopsis of the sort of play she wanted. She was to be at the bottom of all the mysteries and at the top of all the situations; and while no single curtain went up on her, she was to bring them all down—every one. Why particularise further ?

The part the Zanouka's soul yearned for has been played—in blissful dreams—by every leading lady not a lessee. It has been performed—in actuality—by every leading lady who *is*, for a brief and wintry season.

“Write!” commanded the Zanouka, with a double-barrelled flash of her great eyes. For what else had she taken the trouble to fascinate a man of the pen but that he should use that instrument in her service?

So Ravill collected his thoughts, which made but a scanty show, and sat down in the back-garden end of her musky little St. John's Wood drawing-room, and tried to write. But his ideas would not flow, somehow. He ate a gross of the Zanouka's quill pens, and filled her Japanese waste-paper basket with torn-up sheets of the pink notepaper with the sprawling gold “Z” in the left-hand corner. He did not dream that that capital was to be for him the ultimate letter of the Alphabet of Love. Meanwhile, Circe, enthroned upon Liberty cushions, watched him with great greedy eyes.

“Dear friend, you make no progress. Is it that you can find no inspiration—here?”

Ravill made some lame excuse about being accustomed to work in his library at home. He forgot to administer the complimentary sugar-plum his enchantress wanted, while he realised, with a sudden deadly sinking at the heart, that his inspiration was lacking. He did not own the truth—even to himself—but he went home next day forgetting to announce his arrival, as he should have done, by a telegraphic message from Buxton, whose anti-rheumatic waters he was supposed to be quaffing in company with the distinguished actor-manager who had produced his latest play.

Mrs. Ravill greeted her husband calmly and without undue surprise. She was seated at her writing-table—

the well-used writing-table over which she had bent so patiently in the years of his remembrance, toiling, toiling, with bent brows and set mouth, over the scrawled pages of his manuscript. She was not the ordinary type of wife. She did not ask him how Derbyshire had agreed with him ; she preserved a silence, which Ravill gratefully recognised, upon that subject. But he was not quite so satisfied with her reticence upon others. She was usually a vivid talker. One had merely to suggest to her the merest shadow of an idea, and she would grasp it, clothe it with the graces of her own imagination, lend it fire from her eyes, wit from her lips, strength from her own rich heart and brain, until it lived in verity. She was used to be a wonderfully subtle reader, and would remodel his clumsy phrases and polish his dull repartees until he scarcely recognised his amended dialogue as it sounded on her tongue. But now she was silent and distract, and he resented her lack of interest. She was unenergetic and unhelpful—the woman who through long years had toiled for him so cheerfully.

He went to his study and shut himself in—without, however, locking the door—and worked as he had never worked before. Hours passed, and a feeble little plot for a first act was born to him. He admitted that it was poor and mean and miserable, as it sprawled upon the blotted paper. But he knew a skilful physician who had brought to healthy adolescence many such another; and he took it to her where she sat busily writing and thrust it into her hands. She laid it aside, and looked him in the face.

“ I think it would be wiser not to read it.”

Ravill could not believe that he had heard aright.

“ What did you say ?”

“ I think,” said Mrs. Ravill, “ it would be better not to read it.”

Ravill’s eyes expanded. His understanding was to

undergo the same process later on, while his self-conceit was correlative to diminish.

“ Better not to read it ? Why ? ”

“ Because,” returned Mrs. Ravill sedately, “ afterwards we might clash. You might say”—with an irrepressible flash of satire—“ that I had borrowed some of your ideas.”

“ For what ? ” cried Ravill.

“ For my play,” answered his wife.

“ Your play ? ” echoed Ravill. He tried to speak incredulously, jeeringly, but he turned cold—with a deadly, creeping fear.

She answered him in quiet, even tones :

“ I should have said that play of mine, which shall bear my name in the place of yours; for the reflected lustre of your fame dazzles me too much. It is my turn to sit in the shade behind the curtain.”

Ravill understood now, as she rose and faced him.

“ I have been, in the years that are past and shall come no more,” said his wife, “ your drudge—your tool—your patient, willing slave. I have been content to see you gather the laurels I had won; sniff up the incense of the praises that should have been mine; squander the thousands my gifts had gained, upon women like the woman whose kiss is upon your lips as I speak to you, and who, venal, false, and base as she may be, would despise you if she knew the truth. But you have abused my generosity, worn out my patience, and from henceforth all is changed. I step to my proper altitude. Pitiful trader in borrowed thoughts, strutting jackdaw dressed in peacock-plumes, descend to the level that is yours ! ”

She struck the manuscript upon which she had been working, with her open hand before she tossed him back his own. Then she turned her face from him, and drew her chair to the table again, and was soon as wrapt in her

work as if there had been no one in the room ; while Ravill stood upon one spot on the carpet, revolving the position, which has very much revolved since that day. For Ravill may be now seen in the front of the box on first-nights. Mrs. Ravill sits behind the curtain.

And people guess the truth, which she has never plainly told, though Ravill has varnished over the bare places in his own way. His wife hardly did him justice in saying he was utterly destitute of gift. He has some talent for fiction.

“ I shall write no more,” he says to his listeners in the lobbies. “ I have carved my name upon the age with my pen ; it is time that I lay it aside, and make way for the rising generation. Yes, she has a charming gift of style and of expression—first discovered by Me ; first fostered by Me ; developed during the years when she acted as my amanuensis. Shall we return to the box ? The curtain is going up upon the Last Act !”

THE MISSION OF SELINA

REGY had risen early—to be exact, at a quarter past eleven; he had breakfasted—coffee, curried prawns, raw Norwegian dried salmon, claret, and bananas; he had smoked three cigarettes, one after the other, as he read his letters; he had had a musical inspiration as he burned the last bill; and in wide, French gray trousers, blue-striped silk-flannel shirt, the last new collar and tie, a Japanese kimono (silver stars upon a scarlet-and-yellow ground), he threw himself carelessly upon the music-stool and composed a delicious melody, which, if it did not throb with originality, at least testified to Regy's possession of a good musical memory and a certain amount of technical skill. All he wanted when he had jotted it down was a pathetic little song to tack to it, a couple of stanzas of some great master of rhythm about the sea, and the moon, and the surgings of an unsatisfied soul beating itself upon the shore of Life until the tide went out . . . and “all that sort of thing,” said Regy. He was a Walker of Wilts—the second son of a good old family, and he had broken away from the Walker traditions and outraged the Walker sense of propriety in declining to enter the Church, thus securing the reversion of the cosy Rectory—in the Walker gift—and the comfortable income attached, at present enjoyed by his Uncle John—the Rev. John Walker, D.D., incumbent of Cuddlebury. There had always been a Doctor of Divinity in the Walker family, who shepherded the souls of Cuddlebury as by inherited right. What was an Associate of the R.A.M. in comparison with so reverend and respectable a distinction ?

But Regy would not have exchanged his A.R.A.M. for all the D.D.'s in the gift of Oxford or Cambridge. He was supremely satisfied with himself, and looked it. He composed little songlets, sometimes merry quartettes also, which were dropped into musical comedies in need of "extra lyrics." He played the piano accompaniments for Miss Lyra de Lysle and other well-known theatrical artists, who, in the intervals of acting, sang at concerts, public and private; and always the songs were his own. He had the gift of writing melodies within the octave, and of covering weak places or lamentable gaps in the vocal registers of fair performers with chords piled on chords, or effects *pianissimo*. A very eminent firm of music publishers brought out his works, very nicely lithographed, under the flourishing signature "Reginald." And he got his royalty of sixpence on each copy, and spent it happily enough. He gave little first-Thursday-in-the-month teas, with rose-leaf preserves and orange-flower biscuits; and it was not unusual to find him entertaining a dozen smart women and not a single man. He had a pink-and-white complexion and golden curls, and large blue eyes of the cerulean hue peculiar to the hero of the penny novelette. And he preferred beauty that was seasoned and ripened by time and experience—or, at least, he pretended to. This made some women very happy, and hurt nobody. When you had known him perhaps five minutes he would address you as "dear friend"; and supposing he had occasion to write to you, he began the letter without any prefix at all, so that until you turned to the signature you were completely convinced that only the second sheet of rather a lengthy epistle had been posted by mistake.

"Tum-tum-ti—Tee—Tum—BLUM!" sang Regy, jamming a Turkish slipper with a curly toe well down on the

loud pedal as he struck the final *arpeggio*. "Hooray ! it's a real melodic gem !"

He was never shy of owning to himself that he was a singularly gifted writer of tender and touching tunes.

"Oh, for words to fit—something in this style :

'And from the moaning shore . . .
Part to return no more. . . .

"Why ain't I a poet ?

'Drawn to the wuthering sea.

"Can seas wuther, or is it only wind that does ?

'Drawn to the wuthering sea,
Until—O soul of me—!

"By George ! I believe I *am* a bit of a poet.

'Until Eternity—

"She gets in her high note there, and it ought to be a good 'un ; she's been resting for half a bar.

'Eter-ni—!"

There was a knock. The door was gently opened. Sound being deadened by an old gold plush *portière*, the person who knocked was not prepared for the pandemonium of sound into which a single step over a high art doormat landed her.

"If you've come for another lesson, Baby," said Regy, over his shoulder, "you must pay me a ki— Great Scott ! it's Selina !" He sprang from the music-stool, oversetting it with the tail of his kimono, his wide scarlet-and-yellow, stork-embroidered sleeves flapped like wings as he advanced upon his sister, saying: "Look here, I can bear it best if you let me have it plump. How many of them are dead at home ?"

"Not one—not anybody!" shrieked Selina, for Regy's pink colour had deserted him.

"Then why in thunder have you dropped on a fellow from the skies?" began Regy. Then his heart melted. He took Selina's little drab-gloved hands, and gave her a brotherly peck upon the cheek, and said: "Take off your furs and sit down, old girl. You're up shopping for the day, and it was very kind of you to give me five minutes. But send a postcard next time. Surprises spoil my nerve and bungle my touch. All artists are like that."

"Artists! But I—I thought you called yourself a musical composer?" cried Selina.

"I do," said Regy, twisting his neat moustache; "and so do a lot of other people. Do you suppose that Art means only putting paint on paper or canvas with a brush? But, of course you do. Let us talk of something more in your line than art—the blouse sale at Blackley's, for instance."

"There isn't any blouse sale at Blackley's," Selina faltered: "or if there is, I haven't come up to it. Father has sent me to keep house for you."

Regy opened his blue eyes very wide, and looked hard at Selina. Her compact little figure, clad in a brown tweed gown, made by the country town tailor, her drab gloves, felt hat adorned with a matter-of-fact bow of washable ribbon, and strong, thick-soled country boots, seemed to have walked as from out of another world into his first floor at Cavendish Street. He retreated as he gazed, and sat upon the miniature grand piano with a crash of keys.

"What did the old man do that for? What on earth has he got in his head now? Did I write and *say* I wanted somebody to come and keep house?" he queried, not politely, but plainly. "Do I look as if I wanted a house-keeper? And wouldn't it have been common sense and

common civility to write and ask me if I wanted one—before coming ?”

“ Common sense—common civility,” cried Selina, reproachfully. “ Is that the way you speak of your own father ?”

“ It’s true I ought to know my own father better than to expect either common sense or common civility from him,” said Regy, acidly. “ But in kindness to you—his own daughter—wouldn’t it have been better to have asked me before coming ?”

“ Asked you first—your own sister ?” repeated the wide-eyed Selina.

Regy coughed, conscious of a pang of conscience, and pretended to consult an A.B.C.

“ An excellent Parliamentary train,” he said, “ with special reserved first-class carriages for ladies, leaves Waterloo at 3.35. If you will lunch with me at Prince’s at 1.15 we shall be able to do a gallery;” he named in his own mind a highly moral exhibition of carefully-draped classical and romantic paintings by an Academician who was considered a daring innovator in middle Victorian days, but is now regarded as especially suitable for the young person. “ And I’ll buy you some gloves in Bond Street,” he went on, looking with brotherly disparagement at Selina’s really small and pretty hands.

“ Regy—you don’t understand. This is partly my doing—my coming, I mean. This met my eye a week ago.” She pulled out of her pocket a carefully-folded page, torn from the last issue of the *Theatrical and Musical Puffer*. The page bore a photo of Regy, clad in the kimono with the stars, sitting at the miniature grand piano, surrounded by a group of lady-pupils, Miss Lyra de Lysle, prominent in the foreground, in the act of crowning the master’s brow with a garland of photographic studio roses. “ I was

shocked—horrified beyond expression, to find to what my brother had sunk; I rushed to mother—told her all—left her in hysterics, and flew to father——”

“ By George! my good girl, a pretty kettle of fish you’ve made of it,” yelled Regy. “ Why didn’t you send a burning brand round the family and get up a special service at St. Bradold’s for the reclamation of the lapsed and lost ?”

“ I shall reclaim you myself, Reginald,” said Selina, with a lofty look. “ You are not *all* depraved—all frivolous—you are sound at the core. The crust of flippancy, vulgarity, and worldliness that has formed upon you must be removed; then I shall get down to the real, genuine Reginald Walker. And until I do reach him”—she drew off her drab gloves and sat down on the sofa—“ I stay here. You have a spare room, your landlady tells me. If it is not comfortable I can have yours,” ended the home missionary.

Regy’s nature was a yielding one, and he had always been accustomed to be lectured by Selina, his senior by three years. He struck a feeble blow for independence and the rights of man; then gave in.

“ My dear Selina, if I adopt a *pose*—I don’t admit it, observe, I say ‘if,’ it is to advertise my wares. Yes, songs are wares, and sell well, let me tell you. How should I manage, on an allowance of a hundred a year from the gov—— from father? I might exist—I couldn’t live. And I pull off six hundred jimmies—pounds, I mean—*per annum*, what with sixpenny fees, and concert engagements, and complimentary cheques for making people talk at swell ‘At Homes.’ For it’s the peculiarity of London society that it never has anything to say unless somebody is singing. That’s what it goes to the Opera for—to talk. Not to listen, by any manner of means. The listener is

called a crank. Hence the little groove I fill in my little way, and the little exordium I have just delivered. And now, would you like to go and rest in the spare room until I'm ready to take you out to lunch at Prince's ? I can't give you mine, because I have a piano there, and the spare room won't hold one; but in all other respects you'll find it quite cosy. And don't think I'm not glad to see you. Stop a month if you can stand it——”

“I am not here for my pleasure, but for your good, Reginald,” said Selina, and went away to unpack her little tin trunk, shaking her head as Reggy shouted after her:

“You've brought a theatre gown and evening wrap, I hope. For we're going to the Jollity to-night to see the new musical play. Two of my songs in it, and Lyra de Lysle is to sing 'em.”

“This is all very terrible,” said Selina in the hasty letter dashed off with a violet ink pencil, in which she apprised the dear ones down in Wiltshire of her **safe** arrival on the scene of her missionary labours. “All very terrible and most sad, but I see a gleam of light amongst the tangled shadows that have obscured dear Regy's path.” Then she smartened herself up and went out to lunch with her black sheep.

“Let me introduce my sister,” Regy said to ten or twelve smart people during the afternoon. And the smart people seemed so convinced that Selina was proud of being Regy's sister, and had come up to him to gain some reflection from his shining laurels, that the missionary from home found it impossible to maintain a deprecating attitude. After lunch Regy took her to a private view, not of the works of the middle Victorian artist. The walls of the three small rooms were hung with impressions which gave the effect of being corners cut off unfinished pictures. But Selina was told that there never had been any more of

them than she then saw, and that the world was uncommonly lucky to get that.

And then they went to tea at Lady Archie Petherden's luxurious flat in Dover Street. Lady Archie was lying on a dusky orange-coloured divan (she was a very tall, handsome personage of the ivory-skinned, tan-haired type) surrounded with white Pomeranians and male friends.

"You dear, dear person," she cried, on seeing Regy, "what have you brought me?" and seemed a little disappointed when Regy produced Selina. Having done this he fell into a large chair near the divan, and was instantly absorbed in conversation with Lady Archie.

Meanwhile a little, large-eyed young lady in an embroidered linen costume of Dalmatian type and wearing a great many strings of crockery beads about her neck, drew near to administer talk and tea to Selina.

"How wonderful he is, isn't he?" she said, as she manipulated a Japanese teapot. "How much he must be to you: how proud you must all be of him at home. That new song of his, 'The Wash of the Wave,' made me cry yesterday at the Lampion Hall. One could *hear* the wash of the wave and realise the girl's despair. His scholarship is so wonderful, too, though he never *forces* admiration. His musical ideas are full of *real vitality*, and he has the gift of *tune*."

"We all admit that, Miss Mallinder," said a long-haired young man, wearing a high black cravat and hardly any collar. "To call Oblinsky's 'Last Kiss' a tune would be straining language, but when a composer has what in Reginald one may admit is genius, the simplest phrase will produce in the mind of the listener an effect in all respects as vivid as that imparted by the most fully-developed melody. The idea is original, and the idea is nervous. Therefore it succeeds."

“Hark! Lady Archie has persuaded him to come to the piano,” said the young lady with the Dalmatian embroideries, whom the long-haired young man had addressed as “Miss Mallinder.” Regy was led to the instrument as a Druid high-priest might be conducted to inspect an altar, before sacrificing a babe or so to Bel. Selina stared at him, wondering at his easy air, at the grace with which he arranged his flowing frock-coat and threw back his hair, cast a laughing glance of protest up at Lady Archie, and another to a kneeling votary, a slim girl in white serge with a silver belt and a hair-plait about two yards long, who had come in quietly and dropped down by the instrument. To a moustached man in a brown velvet coat and green silk tie, who was afraid that she ought to have a chair, the slim girl in white serge said, “Oh no, no, *please!*! Don’t talk to me—we are going to hear the new song,” and as she spoke she patted Regy’s right cuff with a little eager air, and Regy smiled upon her. Then he played a short, very short, prelude, and sang the new song, “The Wash of the Wave.” There was hardly any of it—Regy had barely begun before he was leaving off; but the tune was haunting, and the words, though they really possessed no meaning at all, seemed to have a great deal. Selina found herself gulping, saw the room, with its Oriental china and French pictures, Regy’s back and the profiles of his attentive listeners through glasses—she always wore glasses—that were bedewed with tears. Then he obliged with a love dirge, “The Last Leaf,” and when the remaining petal dropped from the bridal garland upon the stone under which the bride slept, and the bridegroom’s tears froze to ice-diamonds as they fell, the listeners were profoundly moved. And Selina’s best cambric handkerchief with embroidered corners was reduced to a damp ball. She recalled her one romance, for like every young woman of

her age—and I decline to tell it you—she had had her romance. He was a not-too-young squire of the orthodox type, who had seen his ideal in Selina; had held her little drab-gloved hand in a green Wiltshire lane, and asked her to give it him to keep. A hunting widow had afterwards made the squire the captive of her crop and left-foot spur, but Selina believed him to have secretly consumed with regret the remainder of his days, cut short by gout of an inflammatory type. Therefore she wept, and her fellow listeners also; the very Pomeranians howled, and would not be comforted with sugar, and when Regy took an airy leave of his worshippers, Lady Archie kissed Selina upon either cheek, and said, in heartfelt tones: "*How I envy you!*"

Thus Selina began to be shaken on her throne of previous conviction. If this was the daily life of the prodigal, it was an uncommonly pleasant one. She constantly put the thought from her—but it was the first step downhill.

"Nice woman, Lady Archie . . . yes," agreed Regy, as he hailed a hansom. "She was a daughter of Lord Twingden, and married the eldest son of the old Marquis of Cumminster, the curious old fellow, you know, who always wears white frock-coats in December, and got hugely taken in over a forged tiara of Menephthal—made by a Frenchman at Montmartre—for which he planked eighteen thousand."

Selina did not know, but her heart warmed to the daughter-in-law of a nobleman, even though he wore white frock-coats and planked eighteen thousand for a tiara. She asked with a new and reverential note in her voice:—

"And that slight girl in white, with the golden hair, and Norwegian silver belt. Is she—is she also somebody with a—with a title? She looked distangy."

"*Distinguée*—and, no, she isn't in 'The Peerage.' She is—if you must know—that is Lyra de Lysle."

"But the awful person who was putting that wreath on your head in the horrid photograph reproduction in *The Theatrical and Musical Puffer* wore short skirts and a Pierrette's cap."

"That was the costume belonging to one of her parts at the Jollity. The photograph that has set you all on end was taken at a dress rehearsal, just by way of a joke. They were rehearsing the three songs you'll hear her sing to-night. I posed at the piano for a lark, the other girls got round, and Lyra crowned me with property roses. Where the impropriety of it comes in, I fail to see."

Regy yawned, and lighted a cigarette, and Selina took her snub quietly. She had begun to admire—almost to envy—this young man, who shed upon his daily path these little splashes of song. It occurred to her that the mothers' meetings and village schoolroom concerts—the sole enlivements of winter in Cuddlebury, would seem duller and deadlier than ever after this brief peep into the forbidden world of art.

Regy's three love-songs, sung with wonderful finish and charm by the lovely Lyra, were applauded to the echo that night. One was sad and two were merry, and Selina wept tears that reddened her nose over the sad one, and laughed ecstatically over the gay ones, and fell upon Regy's neck when they reached his chambers, and told him he was a wonderful—glorious—astonishing genius. And Regy, who knew that he was nothing of the kind, was pleased and flattered, and Selina spent a very pleasant month in London, in total oblivion of her mission.

* * * * *

"Tell me of my darling boy!" wrote Mrs. Walker. "Tell me that you have snatched him from perdition, and

relieve a mother's breaking heart!" Selina, in the midst of a lesson from Regy, merely glanced over the maternal appeal and thrust it into her pocket.

"From mother," she said: "she asks after you, as she always does. Now, let me do that bit over again. . . . I've made up my mind to astonish the Owlidge girls at our next village school concert."

And she sang to the composer's accompaniment in a soprano of the description known as "thin":

"And from the moaning shore,
Part to return no more.
Drawn to the wuthering sea,
Until Eternity!
Eter-ni-tee!"

THE MACWAUGH AND FAME

THE MACWAUGH, after a somewhat protracted excursion into the realms of the Commonplace, began to be conscious of the spur of the creative instinct, and knew that his peculiar genius was about to burgeon afresh. He painted pot-boilers doggedly for another fortnight; and then, with a deep sigh, dropped his sheaf of brushes into a bath of turpentine and pitched his palette upon a convenient chair.

"An' yonder scairt makes up the half-dizzen," said The MacWaugh. He stretched his brawny arms and shook his shaggy head, and heaved a tremendous sigh.

"Prut ! what is dis ?" said old Karl Voss, shuffling into Number Five to return a loan of whisky. " *Teufel !* You haf proke out in anodder direction. You haf decided to gourt bobularity and dickle de ordinary daste, is it not so ? Und, I gif you my vord, you vill do it ! Where is de gork-screw ? We will trink goot luck to de bicture and christen it, if you haf not already ?"

"I would be glad to know," said The MacWaugh, knocking off the top of the whisky-bottle with a smart stroke of the palette-knife, and hauling a soda-syphon out of the bottom of the cupboard by the fireplace, " how it is possible for a douce an' temperate man to maintain that reputation " —he reached a couple of tumblers from the mantelshelf and held them critically to the light—" wi' temptation brought to his very elbow by an auld perverter o' moraleety in goloshes an' a Tam o' Shanter." He removed Karl's red woollen cap, polished the glasses with its tassel, and replaced it lightly on the bald head of the aged artist. " I'll no' be

bidding ye say when," he continued, pouring out a stiff peg for Karl and a stiffer for himself; "because weel ye ken ye could never bring yoursel' to do it." He splashed in the soda, and handed the cooling beverage to his guest, carelessly omitting to dilute the alcohol in his own tumbler.

"Here is luck," said Karl, "to de new deaburture. It vill be de opening of an era, I gif you my vord."

"Ye darkened auld Egyptian!" roared The MacWaugh, "daur ye tell me to the naked face ye look upon that"—the contempt expressed by the gesture of his turpentine thumb towards the wet canvas on the easel was simply ineffable—"that! as onything oot o' the common?"

"Danks Gott, nein!" responded Karl. "It is as brosaic as an akrigultural rebort. Und it is as simple und as true as de Nature it represends." He drained his tumbler and set it on the floor. "You haf bainted a dumble-down, red-tiled farm-house standing in an old garden on de panks of de Thames. . . ."

"A mile above Chubsey Weir," said The MacWaugh. "An' it's a mill, an' no' a farmhouse, since ye are so fond o' accuracy."

"It is de mont' of June," went on Karl, taking his pipe out of his mouth and resting it on his knee. "Dere is red hawthorn in flower und red chestnut. De hedge of early red roses, de heavy beonies, und de mass of red bean-plossoms in de forekround strike de dominant note in dis ingandescent foornace of red. Dere is a red twilight dat burns low on de horizon, und is reflected in de river down to which de garden runs. Red chafers—if one could see dem—are buzzing und boooming under de trees; de berfumes are red, *ach, ja!* Und de central figure of de gomposition is a tall girl in white. De red shows through de hand mit vich she shades her eyes from de red klare; she is like a lily dipped in plood or a martyr-virgin reechoicing in de flame

of de pyre—or nodings poot a girl waiding for her lofer. It is a kreat—a very kreat bicture; Israels might be broud of hafing bainted it.” Karl’s voice had become dreamy; his pipe, which had long gone out, was slipping to the floor when it was rescued by The MacWaugh.

“Man,” he said, “for a fairly reasonable creature ye are talking the daftest nonsense I ever heaird. Praise, lavished upon this meeserable daub upon the easel, a grief to the eye and a scunner to the soul, is an insult to the man that has stooped for a few paltry punds to defile his brush with cheap realism, and prostitute his genius to the vulgar herr-d.” Feeling overpowered The MacWaugh; he hastily poured out and drank off a peg of extraordinary size, or Karl might have witnessed that most overwhelmingly pathetic of all emotional upheavals (according to the sentimental novelist), the spectacle of a strong man in tears.

“Toch !” he said, wiping his eyes, “that is fine heartsome stuff your United Presbyterian Earl is in the habit o’ sending ye. Only a pillar o’ the Kirk would warm his wame wi’ the like o’ it. And now I will be asking ye to go.” He caught up the wet canvas, dumped it down in the corner, face to the wall; screwed down the easel-bar to the floor, and removed from the wall a canvas of Brobdingnagian proportions and virginal whiteness. “Awa’ wi’ ye, man !” he said, looking round for charcoal. “I am moved in speerit to testify to the glory o’ Art, an’ my right hand is strengthened wi’ cunning.” He found the charcoal, and began to deal out tremendous strokes, right and left.

“*Schwerlich!* I am going to take meinself off,” said Karl, getting up. “Poot you will tell me de subject of your new gomposition ? Is it not so ?”

“Ye would wile a boa constrictor out o’ his monthly rabbit, ye honey-tongued auld seducer !” said The MacWaugh. “But this I’m telling ye in confidence

though weel I ken ye will blab the secret in the lug o' every loafer ye meet. But let them hear ! Let them hear an' gnash their teeth ! This is, or will be, the maist inspired work o' genius that has ever sprung from the brain o' mortal man. There will be mystery in it, an' wonder, an' gloom. There——”

“ Poot what is de subjecht ?” persisted Karl.

“ Toch !” said The MacWaugh, cartooning furiously, “ am I no' telling you ? It will be ca'ed ‘ Before the Light.’ It will represent Creation previously to the Fiat. Ye may weel open your eyes.” He ran his charcoaly fingers through his shaggy hair, and tossed it from his rough-hewn brow with a gesture full of conscious power. “ There is no painter leeveng that can deal wi' sic a subjecht except mysel’,” he said modestly. “ Man, does the bare idea o' it no' make ye quake in your goloshes ? And to think all that grandeur and sublimity is to be wasted on a Winter Exhibeetion !” he groaned.

Old Karl's nether extremities were agitated by a curious convulsion, which communicated itself to his legs, passed into his waistcoat, and finally developed in an encyclopaedic smile.

“ I understand. De subjecht of your new bicture is to be de Gosmos before de sun or de moon or any of dose liddle dings vere gompleted to light it up. I gongratulate you on de idea. *A brobos* of dis, you will follow with anodder subjecht of de same *genre* ?”

“ Toch ! it is mair than likely,” said The MacWaugh, “ seeing that I am the one man drawing the breath o' life that can paint that kind o' thing. What would ye suggest ?”

Karl's smile had reached his eyes by this time, and twinkled merrily behind his dusty spectacles. “ De bainter dat can rebräsent de world before de light vas created,” he

said, "should baint a bicture of Moses——" He stopped to chuckle.

"Toch!" grunted The MacWaugh. "Why Moses? Out wi' it, ye cunning auld Apollyon!"

"Moses after de candle vas plown out. If you kon do chustice to de one," chuckled Karl, "you kon do more dan chustice to de odder. Und de choke is nearly so ancient as de Creation."

"I will no' detain you longer," remarked The MacWaugh, with distant politeness, as Karl, still beaming, shuffled to the door. "Leave my palette," the offended artist coldly requested.

"Why, I haf not your palette!" said Karl, stopping.

"Ye are wearing it for a bustle at this moment," retorted The MacWaugh.

"*Teufel!* Why did you let me sit myself upon it?" ejaculated Karl, with some slight difficulty removing the article attached. "I am all smoddered mit your beastly bigments!"

"Dinna apologise," said The MacWaugh, taking the palette from his senior. "It sairly needed cleaning. And the effect is far from being unpicturesque!"

"Prut!" said Karl, recovering good-humour and abandoning the attempt to ascertain the seat of the damage by personal observation. "I shall be able to show de people I meet und tell about your kreat Gosmos bicture exactly what dat bicture will be like! Koot afternoon! I go to send my drousers to be stretched und framed for de Agademy."

He went away chuckling, and left The MacWaugh to be the prey of the gods. For the next three weeks the inspired one was at the mercy of his Inspiration. Tons of paint were absorbed by that vast acreage of canvas. When the working day was over, The MacWaugh, instead of setting

out clubwards or patrolling the courtyard with his pipe, would sit astride upon a chair, grating his rough chin upon his painty hands, and gloomily glaring at the embryonic masterpiece. And the funds grew lower and lower, and Mrs. Kitt, wife of the porter of North-West Studios, who had a master-key of entry to every dwelling in the double row, and supplied the dwellers therein with breakfasts and lunches, became restive at the length of The MacWaugh's unpaid bill, and shut down on the supplies. This The MacWaugh did not mind as long as bread, cheese, whisky, and tobacco were attainable. When these failed, remembering an incident recorded by Vasari, he attempted to support his inspiration after the fashion of the immortal Sandro Botticelli. Ellen Angelo, the journalist, who had cropped up as an inmate of North-West Studios some ten months previously, dropping in from Number Four to ask after the progress of the immortal work, found the gaunt Scotchman bending over a very large saucepan which was boiling furiously upon a very small gas-stove. With the directness of the newspaper-interviewer she asked what the vessel contained, and immediately looked into it.

“Eggs!” she exclaimed.

“Eggs,” agreed The MacWaugh. “That is,” he added with the caution of a Scotchman, “out o’ every half-dizzen twa or three will be eggs—hard-boiled. The lave o’ them are conseederable mair advanced. But at fourteen the shilling,” said the philosopher, “what else could ye expect?”

Ellen shuddered, and changed the conversation more brusquely than a plain woman has any right to do.

“Millars has returned from his Swiss holiday,” she said.

“Toch!” A brief evanescent smile hovered about the sternly-set lips of the gaunt and hollow-cheeked MacWaugh. “I was a privileeged witness o’ the prodigal’s return,” he said. “Ye will be remembering that a titled woman-body

o' Millars' acquaintance, a lang, hungry-looking creature wi' daughters, had an attack o' asking Millars to tea early in the spring; an' in the course o' an aristocratic conversation she mentioned that she an' the young ledgies were to spend the autumn on a glacier in the Engadine, an' took it quite as a matter o' course that she would be meeting Millars there."

"So he sold his birthright for twenty-five pounds, and went," observed Ellen Angelo, with a twinkle in her queer green eyes.

"Toch, no!" said The MacWaugh hastily. "The money was no' so hardly come by as that."

"Perhaps a friend lent it to him?" said Ellen, with a keen glance.

"It micht be sae," said The MacWaugh with an indifference too elaborate to convince, "though I am no' acquainted wi' the man mysel'. However, Millars got out, an' my Leddy Langneb—I will no' gi'e ye her richt title for fear o' that stenographic memory o' yours—my leddy received him as though the place belonged to her, an' allowed him to pay for concert-tickets, photographs, an' carriage-drives as graciously as if the callant had been a Duke. Weel, three days syne, a fire broke oot in the hotel before the *table-d'hôte* was half over. Toch!" There was a faint twinkle in the sunken eyes of The MacWaugh. "The fire was leemited to the top storey, whaur the waiters' an' cooks' an' chambermaids' quarters are; an' at the verra first alarm, when a' the feeding bodies in the dining-room rose up from their plates an' skirled, in rushed the proprietor to calm their fears wi' this announcement. So the guests sat doon again, while the fire-hoses were playing on the conflagration," said The MacWaugh, "an' wi' them sat Millars between the Langneb girls, wi' a Spartan smile on his lips, an' a vulture gnawing at his

liver; for the puir creature didna daur confess to his smart freends that his bedroom was a cock-loft in the flagstaff tower, an' sae his portmanteau wi' his pickle money in it an' a' his gear were burr-ned ower his heid while the Langnebs were twittering Society gossip in his lugs. I dinna own but there was something noble aboot the sacrificee," commented the Scotchman. "Though if ye had seen Millars when he came hame!" He stopped to laugh. "Toch! but the sicht was maist extraordinar'! He had pawned his watch an' chain, shirt studs, an' sleeve-links to pay the fare back, his return ticket having gone the way o' the lave o' the combustibles, an' he was in evenin' dress, verra ragged an' disconsolate lookin', wi' a jaunty wee Swiss hat, o' the blue-ribboned, infantine, straw description, that micht have weel matched wi' his fair complexion an' gowden hair, if he had no'—to judge by appearances"—said The MacWaugh guardedly—"slept on the coal-tender o' the Zürich express an' fraterneesed wi' the stokers on the steamer."

"I have no patience with silly boys," said Ellen, shaking her scarlet mane of untidy hair and frowning.

"I have only just learr-ned, after forty years' experience," said The MacWaugh sadly, "to mak' allowances for the folly o' one donnart, misguided, havering puir body o' a man."

"Where are all your books?" asked Ellen suddenly, "and your bits of pottery and armour and tapestry and the other rubbish? The studio looks bare without them."

"Ye will remember Botticelli's studio was as bare as your hand," said The MacWaugh. "I hae my doots if the creature over hearr-d o' Wardour Street, or keeked in at Liberty's window. Yet conseedering these deprivations, an' despite the lack o' artistic *mobili*, Sandy made a creditable figure in his profession. I will no' be offering ye a

eup o' afternoon tea," he said with grave mendacity, "because o' late my medical man has cautioned me against the use o' the deleterious herr-b."

"Does he recommend whisky as a beverage instead?" asked Ellen.

"Whisky," murmured The MacWaugh, with a yearning, retrospective glance towards the empty cellaret. "Toch!" he said, as Ellen went away, "what melody there is in the word when ye ha'ena tasted the thing itsel' for twice twenty-four hoors! I doot but I will be driven to seek a dram from Karl, an' then it will be ten to ane but the cunning auld body worr-ms the truth oot o' me. Toch! I will keep it to mysel' a fortnight mair—till the last touch will be given to an immortal wark, an' then"—he nodded to the haggard reflection in the glass above the mantel-shelf—"then a wondering warld will hail ye, you gangrel loon wi' the empty wame behind your auld waistcoat, as the Painter of the Age! Toch! there is the church clock chapping seven. I must awa' to my pitch in Baker Street, or that frowsy beggar wi' the cross-eyes an' the face pitted wi' small-pox like a crumpet will have jumped it."

And The MacWaugh rapidly completed his promenade toilet with a rusty pilot-cloth overcoat and a battered slouch hat. The pockets of the overcoat he filled with coloured chalks, some odd sponges, a small lantern, and a few candle-ends. Before he went out he looked again in the glass.

"When I turr-n into the Park," he said reflectively, "I will whiten my cheeks wi' chalk, an' take away my character for sobriety wi' a dab or twa o' vermillion aboot the nose. Last nicht brought me in tenpence, an' I may con-fidently expec', this being Thurr-sday, that perr-sons availing themselves o' the Earr-ly Closing Act will swell the returr-ns in the hat to aughteenpence. But sic a hope

is ambeetious—to be encouraged by a mere beginner ! A certain knack," said The MacWaugh modestly, " I may possess; but the technique that deleeneates an upright bloater on a vertical willow-pattern plate, so as no to deceive the maist credulous eye, an' the subtle grasp o' character that leaves it to the spectator to decide which is Roberts an' which is Kitchener—these at present are beyond my chalks. Nor am I yet a guid judge o' flagstones. 'Surface before situation' is an adage which should be impressed upon every budding pavement - artist from youth up-warr-ds."

And The MacWaugh went out. He turned up his collar, pulled down his hat over his eyes, and walked as close under the wall as possible; but these ostrich-like precautions did not deceive Karl Voss's dusty spectacles.

" Dere he goes ! It is as I told you !" he said to Ellen Angelo, who had conceived a warm friendship for the dear old man, and would sit in his studio among his casts and animal studies, or in a chair upon his threshold, evening after evening, listening to the numberless wise and kind and quaint sayings that came from the handsome toothless mouth shadowed by the white moustache. "*Mein Gott !* To dink of it would make me krind my teeth, poot dat I haf not any. Mit such talent, to spend his life in bainting dose damt glassical nightmares, und starving because nobody will puy dem ! Py de Teufel und his krandmutter it drives me mad ! Sometimes I swear—dam !—as you have heard. Odder times I loff," and Karl's waistcoat was agitated by one of his subterranean chuckles. " Ho, ho, ho ! so I loff. Poot you, Miss Anchelo, you cry."

" I'm not !" snapped Ellen savagely, dabbing her eyes, with an inky pocket-handkerchief. " It's hay-fever," she added haughtily, " to which I am subject at this time of the year."

"I will kif you a brescription to cure you," said Karl. "Go, make hay, und ket rid of your fever. Away mit you, und roll out your prains to pie-paste! Write, whedder you haf anyding to say or whedder you haf noding—only work, work, work! It is de only ding. Prut! Do I not know?" His eyes gleamed quite fiercely behind his great dim spectacles, but he patted Ellen's arm gently with the gnarled rheumatic fingers of his mittenred right hand. "'*Alles in der Welt lässt sich ertragen*,' dat is true. Poot de sufferings of dose we lofe, dey are hard to bear," the old German muttered as the woman rose and hurriedly left him. "MacWaugh for a gleffer man is a gonfounded fool! Von day I shall tell him so. Vot is dis?"

The shadow that fell upon the pavement at Karl's goloshes was that of a menial of the Waterworks Company, who presented the aged artist with a neatly printed demand for two quarters' rate.

"*Dummer Teufel!*" exclaimed Karl. "All dis money to pay for water dat I do not drink! It is foolness and cheatery." He puffed and blew with indignation and surprise.

"You mayn't drink much of it," said the official; "you don't look as if you did, but there's cooking and baths."

"De borter's wife doos de cooking," said Karl, "und I do not bath. To bath does not akree mit de Cherman gонstitution," he added proudly.

"Well," said the official, driven to desperation, "you *paint* with watercolours, don't you? And this is a final notice, and if you don't settle up we'll cut you off at the main. I'd be ashamed to dodge the Company, if I was you, when even the pavement-artist that lives at Number Five pays up regular."

"De bavement-artist dat lives at Number Five!" echoed Karl, staring hard at the official's smug face through his

great silver-rimmed spectacles. " *Donnerwetter!* vat do you say?"

" He's worked a pitch in Baker Street on the left-hand side near the Lockland Tea-Rooms to my certain knowledge for a fortnight past," said the Water Company's man. " Only turns up after dusk and keeps his hat down over his eyes; but I don't forget a face I've took a rate of, and I knew him at once. Quite a pretty show he has, with portraits of popular celebrities and the Soldiers' Departure and the Soldier's Return, simultaneous with his letter which has been delayed in transmission, and his sweetheart is reading out loud when he knocks at her cottage door. . . . Must make above a bit, I should say. I gave him a penny myself only last night, and gruff enough he thanked me."

" Hoosh!" cried Karl in terror. " Not so loud! No, do not go. One moment und I komm." He shuffled back into his studio, rummaged in an old desk, and shuffled out again, chinking money in his one useful hand.

" Here is your one pound seven und sixpence for your water dat I have not drunk or washed mit, und here is anodder pound for yourself. Poot you are wrong about dat likeness between de bavement-artist you gafe a penny to in Baker Street, und de odder man dat lives at Number Five. It is a damt mistake. You shall not haf de money oontil you akree mit me. You shall not haf it oonless you bromise to hold your tongue!"

Karl dropped heavily into his armchair as the man gave his ready promise with the receipt for the rate, and pocketed his own bribe and went away.

" *Himmel!*" he gasped. " So it has komm to dis mit him. Und if I tell de Anchelo it will preak her heart. Someding must be done mitout delay. Where is my pipe und de motches? Mitout my pipe I am no goot at all."

A month later, when the first fogs of early November

were beginning to enfold North-West Studios, the crowning work of The MacWaugh's genius stood completed within its frame. The prophecy of the painter had certainly been fulfilled; there was mystery in the picture, and wonder—no end of it; and gloom enough to infect the most cheerful spectator with suicidal yearnings. There was also humour—latent, but humour still.

"It will be rejectit by the Hanging Committee," said The MacWaugh confidently. "Toch! Conseedering that the wark has come into existence at least three hunder' years before its time, is it possible to blame them, puir ignorant fule creatures? But at least they will have seen; an' a few o' the mair enlichtened— What is that ye are saying, Miss Angelo? Twa vans in the courtyarr-d an' twa chiels in green-baize aprons chapping in the ha'? One o' them will be Pickford's, I'm doubting, an' the tither will be sent by Abrahams, the dealer-body, to take awa' the Guid-forsaken pot-boiler that Karl is so fond o'. Toch! I dinna mind where I put the thing four or five weeks syne."

"It is here in de gorner in an Agademy frame," said Karl, who had been pottering about the studio with Ellen Angelo. "Odd, damt odd, dat you should haf forgodden all about it!"

"Avail yoursel' o' the preevilege o' dusting the sublime conception," said The MacWaugh, with sarcasm, "whiles I gi'e a pairting worr-d o' caution to Pickford's man. Toch! If the puir creature did but know the stupendous responsibeelity that will be his between this an' Burlington House, I'm doubting he would be sair unwilling to undertak' it."

And the inspired genius went into the hall to interview Pickford's representative. Meanwhile Karl placed upon the easel The MacWaugh's despised and forgotten pot-boiler, and beckoned Ellen Angelo to look.

"See! It is de drue inspiration—de turning-point in a career. Und dat greedy prute Abrahams is to haf it for a zong."

Ellen drew a long, rapturous breath. Then her green eyes shot sparks. "Herr Voss! If—if by accident—I only say by accident—the labels were changed and this went to Burlington House instead of—" She pointed scornfully to the colossal masterpiece.

"De ding might be manached! It is an Agademy frame. De ding might be done. Poot how?"

Karl was tugging at his white beard and muttering when The MacWaugh came tramping back into the room. He was deadly pale, and his eyes seemed to have vanished. "I have admeenistered the chairge," he began. Then he stopped short.

"Oh! you are ill!" cried Ellen Angelo, as the gaunt framework of a man collapsed into a chair.

"Toch! it is nothing but a weakness," said The MacWaugh. "Lauch if you will, but I canna bear to see"—he pointed to the gruesome expanse of pitchy canvas previously referred to as his Inspiration—"I canna bear to see it gang!"

"Den do not see," said Karl, with suddenly illuminated spectacles. "Go und lie down mit yourself upon your bed." He pointed with a shaky hand to the chamber door. "Miss Anchelo and I will see de bicture packed—is it not so?" And Ellen's green eyes blazed back an answer that was fortunately unintelligible to The MacWaugh.

"Toch! I will take ye at your word!" he said, and stumbled out blindly.

Then Pickford's man came in with bass matting and a packing-case, but not before the labels of the pictures had been changed by Ellen's dexterous fingers

And this is the true story of the conspiracy that brought Fame knocking at the door of The MacWaugh's studio. His rage and grief attained almost epic proportions when the hideous truth was revealed, that his contemned pot-boiler occupied a place of honour upon the line at Burlington House, and that owing to an extraordinary and culpable negligence on the part of some person unknown, the greatest artistic effort of the age had been bundled ignominiously off to Abrahams the dealer.

"Crumbth!" Abrahams said. "The firtht glanth ath ith nearly gave me a thstroke of paralythith. Feth ith away whenever you chooth. I don't want ith! But the other—you've made a thucetheth with ith, and though I bethpoke it for fifteen poundth, ath there ain't no documenth, an' you forgot to athk for the money, do me a companion for theven hundred, and call thingth thquare!"

"For seven hunder' punds!" said The MacWaugh, "ninety men oot o' a hundred would ca' things square. But Robert Waugh is the hundredth man, an' wi' your leave we will terr-m them quadrilateral."

THE HARE

I.

A SMALL, single-roomed, mud-built, thatched hovel, with a tumble-down chimney of crumbly brick, stood upon the edge of a right-of-way leading through the wheat-acres. A gable-end was toward the road. It faced the back of the cottage rented by the man who served as fogger to the farmer.

Save for a tall-headed cabbage or so, a long irregular grave-mound of pitted-up potatoes, and some straggling asters with weazen red blossoms, the patch of garden behind the hovel was given up to weeds. The rail-fence had fallen down years before, and the feet of persons who for various reasons in fur or feathers preferred not to attract the attention of the fogger as they passed into or came from the wheat-acres, which were bordered by a belt of preserved woodland, had trodden a path across. At the bottom of the garden-patch was a thickish brake, where some elder-bushes were intertwined with a great blackberry-bramble. In this brake was the form of a hare.

This chilly mid-December morning, while the mists hung thick and dank over the woods and fields, and every dripping twig and grass-blade waited to shine forth a diamond wonder in the first rays of the sun, the hare lopped out of the brake and sat upright among the cabbages and groundsel, turning his beautiful, lustrous eyes about, and working his mobile nostrils as he sniffed the clean, untainted air.

One long reddish ear, tufted with yellow-white within, was cocked forward, the other lay on his sleek, plump back. He fell to cleaning his whiskers with his fore-feet. Then he remembered the juicy turnips yet globing out of the fat

clay of the sheep-pastures beyond the already greening wheat-stubbles, and lopped off, hitting the moist ground with powerful strokes of his muscular hind-legs.

Whenever the old man who lived in the hovel on the verge of the wheat-acres, peeping with the bleared eyes of doting age through the little pane of glass that was set in the mud wall beside the brick chimney, chanced to see the hare, he chuckled and showed great delight. Always his high, thin, old profile, bleached ivory-white by age, was to be descried through the dim square of greenish glass. The bed-chair from which he never stirred had been given him twenty years before by a village philanthropist, who had omitted to explain the mechanical process by which the day-seat became by night a couch. Consequently, the iron winch, which might have developed the latent possibilities concealed in the piece of furniture, made a figure on the chimneypiece as an ornament, and the old man, who clung so desperately to the last vestiges of his crumbling manhood that he would be roused to senile fury by any attempt to remove his huge, patched boots or deprive him of his hat, never knew the chair as anything but a chair. He was over ninety, and might soon be expected to resign it in favour of a coffin, but in the meanwhile it gave him childish pleasure to see through his peep-hole by the chimney the partridges whir across his patch of neglected garden, the black-and-white plover hover above, skirling to its mate, and the fat and saucy hare coming and going between the lair and the turnip-patch. Many a hare the old man had been allowed to shoot for the farmer's grandfather before the establishment of a pack of local harriers, and the gun he had used—an inheritance that had come to him through marriage—a large-bored, muzzle-loading weapon, with a worn and shortened walnut stock, was displayed even now, capped and loaded, as a hint to

would-be thieves, on a couple of staples over the high chimney-shelf. But if the old woman set eyes on the fat, prosperous-looking creature of the garden-brake, she would shake her withered hand at it angrily and scold:

“ You wickerd, leery beast, git along-on, do ! 'Ev'n't you done harm enough to me an' mine ? Git along wi' 'ee, I tull 'ee ! ”

For fiercely as she hated the partridges and the pheasants and the plover, the hare was her chief enemy of all. She “ shoo'd ” at him furiously. But long before she had tottered out at the back door with her besom, the hare would be gone. She had an uneasy suspicion that from some unsuspected lair it was always watching her and chuckling. She set to work one day, despite her eighty-seven years and crippled, rheumatic fingers, and made, with large, white cat-stitches in a faded scrap of red, twilled calico, a tiny blind for the pane of glass set in the mud wall beside the chimney. But the old man whimpered so at the loss of his peep-hole that the red blind was drawn upon its string only after nightfall. She slept better when she had no longer any fear of the evil thing outside being able to look in upon her out of the dark.

Her father, the man who had owned the short-stocked muzzle-loader over the chimney-shelf, had been a poacher, convicted and hanged in the stern old days when the law recognized no scale of degrees in sinning, but strung up the man who stole a sheep or wired a rabbit with the same rope that hanged a murderer.

The ancient, her husband, had been an honest man; but the blood-taint had shown in their son, dead many years ago, and his son, the idol of her old age, had been tried at the assizes, convicted, and sent to penal servitude twenty years before. He had made one in a midnight raid of game-netters, in which a keeper had been shot and another badly

clubbed. And while the ringleaders, for whom a dog-cart waited on the road, got away with the loss of their nets, a hare or so, and half a score of pheasants, the boy had been traced to the mud cottage by the wheat-acres, and dragged by men in blue uniforms out of the old people's lives. They had not heard of him since he had left the county gaol for Portland prison. To the neighbours they had pretended they never wanted to hear.

Twenty years ago ! He would be a man of forty now. Ah, the evil wild creatures of the woods and fields, tempting men to their ruin, were as real devils, the old woman believed, as 'Pollyon and Bellybub and the rest of them in the " Pilgrim's Progress." ' The pinch of hunger is a cruel thing, and the rare dole of three loaves and a half-crown a week barely kept the life in her and her old man. But terrible as it was to hear him cry by-times for a bit of meat, or even lard for kitchen to his crust, it would have been more terrible still to have one of " they wickerd beastes " brought by some well-meaning but unscrupulous hand across her slated threshold.

II.

One year a tall, stooping, taciturn, shaggily-bearded man of middle age and solitary habits appeared in the neighbourhood, and thenceforward stayed. Nobody knew how he lived. Sometimes he did odd jobs for a Gipsy-blooded knacker, fetched dead and dying beasts from the farmers' to the blood-stained killing-field, and drove the greasy cart, sitting on the horrible sacks that oozed with grease and gore despite their sprinkling of sawdust. Perhaps it is better not to question the destination of such offal. They said it went to the kennels to feed the county harriers. Possibly some of it did. Those who tried to question the driver of the greasy cart got no answer. He would only grunt some-

thing in his ragged, bushy beard, pull his old, slouched felt down lower over his eyes, and whip up the lean, bony horse.

He was a queer customer, the village said, but not a man to be meddled with, and so they let him be. He was said to live and sleep in the knacker's unclean barn, and though he drank heavily, took his liquor alone. But he was seldom afoot by day. People chatting over their drink at the "Red Cow" or the "Fair Pint" hinted about his taking exercise chiefly by night, but not within hearing of the farmer's bailiff, or in the presence of the local constable, or when one of the keepers employed by the lord of the manor happened to be by. It was best to let such dogs lie sleeping. If any elders of the village guessed at the true name and pedigree of this one, they were discreet and said nothing. But about this time the old woman living in the hovel by the wheat-acres began to be haunted by a footstep.

At midnight, when the smelly paraffin lamp had been extinguished, and the last embers were dying in the rusty grate, and the old man snored shrilly in the chair-bed, and the old woman lay upon the rusty iron bedstead by the wall, and huge, perambulating spiders rustled in the rotting thatch, and the mice squeaked and scabbled under the rotting floor-boards, the footstep would cross the garden patch behind the cottage, passing to the wheat-acres that were edged by a long, straggling belt of preserved woodlands.

It was a long, light, stealthy step. The old woman knew it well. It had been her father's and her son's and her son's son's. It was a voice calling to her across three graves. Two were in the churchyard. She had never known where the third had been dug. When grey dawn filtered in through the cracks in the shutters, and the little red calico square that covered the peep-hole "longside of chimbley" blushed faintly pink before turning ruddy, the long, light, stealthy step passed back.

Once the old woman had had a terrible dream. It was on a September night of rare, dazzling brilliancy. The two windows in the front of the cottage were closely shuttered, but the little red calico blind of the peep-hole had been left undrawn. The old man slept; the old woman must have been asleep and dreaming when she thought she opened her eyes and saw the face peering in, crossed by a broad, white ray of moonlight.

The little window just framed it. A dark, wild, hairy face she made it out to be; the face of a stranger, all except the eyes, and they were weeping water. She must have stirred in her sleep, for the dream was gone in an instant. She lay awake till dawn, holding her heart. Before the thrush in the elder whistled a morning note, or the farm-yard cocks crowed, challenging the fogger's wife's buff Orpington, she crept to the pane of glass beside the chimney and drew the little red blind so that she could see without being seen. It was still twilight. A tall, stooping, bearded man coming from the wheat-acres threw his leg over the broken-down rail-fence and passed along the little beaten path that wound among the dewy cabbages. Something like a stick was thrust up his sleeve, and the pockets of his ragged coat were laden and bagged heavily. She must have had a palsy-stroke then, she thought, because everything went away from her, and when she woke up she was lying on the floor. She never looked out at the little window again after that. She would have kept the red blind down always, only that it was the old man's single pleasure to watch for the coming and going of the hare that lived in the brake at the bottom of the garden.

She underwent a second terror not long after the step began to haunt her and the face peered in. She and her old man had been sorely pinched that winter. He would shed childish tears when there was no longer a scrap of

lard upon his bread or a bit of bacon for the Sunday's dinner. But she paid the rent and starved uncomplainingly. And then someone left three pennies in a little pile on the slate sill of the peep-hole window. Scrawled on the slate with a stone were the words,

From A trew Frend.

She trembled guiltily as she took the coppers. Who knew how they had been earned ? She trembled still more when, months later, at nightfall of a bitter wintry day that had been born amid dank mists to the weeping of naked boughs, a heavy, sudden knock came upon the back door, and, drawing the rusty bolts with feeble, agitated hands, she found a bundle on the threshold.

It was heavy, and wrapped in a soiled newspaper. She dragged it in, and shut and locked the door. Then she would have screamed had the scream not died in her throat, for the glossy, mottled brown-and-white plumage of a brace of plump young partridges showed through the torn covering. The accursed thing had crossed her threshold again. There would be no peace or honour any more. At any moment now men in blue uniforms, armed with the terrors of the law, might break in upon her, drag her away to gaol, and leave the old man to starve. What was to be done ?

In her dire extremity she mustered a desperate strength. The shutters were barred, the peep-hole blind was drawn. No one could spy upon her deed. There was a low fire burning in the rusty grate. She piled wood upon it, and, when the blaze leaped, crammed in the newspaper bundle. The birds took an hour to consume, diffusing, with a poignant odour of burned feathers, whiffs as of savoury roast. The old man clapped his hands, but his joy was

changed to mourning when supper proved to be nothing beyond stale crust sopped in kettle-broth. He even rebelled against supreme authority when the blue bowl was thrust into his feeble, trembling hands.

“I wun’t ett’n,” he piped.

“You will ett’n.”

“I wun’t, I tull ’ee. Gie I a bit o’ meat!”

“I ’ev’ n’t got no meat.”

“You ’ev’, I tull ’ee! Can’t I smull ’n ?” His old nose quivered with eagerness as he snuffed the richly tinctured atmosphere. “If I ’ev’ n’t got the use o’ my legs,” he asserted, “my smull be left me. You can’t play no ’ock’ard tricks wi’ me.”

“I bain’t playin’ ’ock’ard tricks wi’ ’ee. You be a martel old, ancient man, an’ you be woid-like by times, an’ dunno what ’ee be talkin’ about. Take an’ ett your supper an’ be washed an’ go to bed.”

He hugged the bowl close, and began to ply the spoon, mumbling:

“I’ll ett my supper, but I wun’t be washed!”

She filled a tin basin from the kettle, placed it on a corner of the rickety deal table, got a huckaback towel from behind the door, a square of fatigued-looking flannel, and a cube of yellow soap from the shelf at the top of the wall-cupboard by the chimney, where some worn-out garments hung from rusty hooks. Her brown, eagle-featured, keen-eyed, old face, framed in the quilted sunbonnet of day wear, showed her old man a front of implacable determination. But her heart was water within her, and she shook in every limb. She had scarce strength for the nightly battle, but she advanced upon him as unfalteringly as Fate.

“Take off your ’at!” she commanded.

He held on to the cherished headgear with both hands.

“Take off your ’at, our Dad, an’ let I wash ’ee!”

" You can wash I when I be de-ad," he declared, " an' not afore !"

She rose to absolute majesty as she turned on him.

" When *I* be dead you may git so crummy as a cuckoo. But while I live I'll wash 'ee !"

The old man caved in.

III.

The last red embers in the grate were slowly fading, but not before every scrap of tell-tale bone had been consumed. There was sharp frost, and every sound travelled with extraordinary clearness upon the rarefied atmosphere. The piercing cry of a hunting owl, mousing along the rick-eaves, might have been uttered close at hand. More footsteps than one had passed through the garden behind the cottage that night. Midway upon the path men had stopped, conferred in whispers, and then gone on again, while the old woman lay listening and shaking.

The old man slept wrapped in a couple of thin, old blankets, his huge, patched boots supported on a chair, his head resting on a chintz-covered cushion. His inseparable hat, an aged bowler of prehistoric fashion, green with indefatigable wear, was tied on with a red, white-spotted cotton handkerchief knotted under his bristly old chin. His toothless mouth was wide open; shrill whistling snores proceeded from the organ above. But the old woman lay shaking and listening.

Then that for which she had lain waiting in her father's time, waiting in her son's time, waiting in her grandson's time, happened in those sinister woods beyond the stubble wheat-acres. A medley of fierce and ominous sounds broke forth; men shouted; blows were struck; shots rang out; cries and yells and whoops of pursuers made hideous discord of the calm silence of the night, and then died out upon the distance.

The old woman sat up on her rusty-iron bedstead with the stiff, ungainly movement of a wooden puppet. A little flame that had sprung up among the dying embers showed how her scant chemise revealed her gaunt and livid shoulders, and how the muscles of her scraggy, brown throat and stick-like arms were gnarled like the roots of an old elm-tree. The footsteps that she knew were running across the wheat-acres. She pushed back the yellowed nightcap from her scant, gray hair to listen better.

The footsteps came nearer, with a panting breath. A man leaped the broken rail-fence. He seemed to hesitate; then, swerving aside, he dived into the brake at the bottom of the old folks' garden.

There was a frightened squeak, and something soft and furry bolted out. It was the hare. But the man was the more desperately frightened of the two. He knew exactly what the thing was that he feared and fled from. The law had had its clutches on him before. Whatever room he sat in now had to him exactly the dimensions of a prison-cell. He walked with the convict's skulk, and looked upon the world out of the convict's cringing, watchful, shifty eyes. And his were the convict's atrophied mind and deadened soul. But a spark dwelt in him yet that had led him back to live as a stranger in the neighbourhood of the old home where he had been reared in poverty and bred in ignorance, although the act had resulted for him in his sinking to even lower depths of degradation than before. And something like a throb of pity and kindliness had prompted him to put the pennies on the window-sill and leave at the threshold the snared birds.

He was in for it now. This time the guilt of bloodshed was his, and not a stranger's. He breathed in gasps as he recalled how he had discharged both barrels of the shortened gun he carried point-blank at the foremost of the men who

had run in upon the poachers, and when he fell, had clubbed the weapon and beaten another over the head with it, smashing in the skull. He was no boy now that could be taken easily. There would be a desperate fight before they got him again. There was no escape. They were ringing him in from every quarter as harriers ring a hare. He was not at all deceived by the apparent quiet, or by the fact that the hue and cry had trailed off in a direction other than his line of flight. Detection was inevitable. He might lie hidden from pursuers in the brake an hour longer, perhaps several hours. They were bound to close in before long. And already the stars were fading, and the east was growing gray.

Hark ! That was the sound of a door being softly unbolted. Rusty hinges creaked. A pair of huge old list slippers shuffled through the cabbages, riming in the first frost. A quaking whisper reached the listener in the brake.

“ Our George !”

Dead silence.

“ Be you theer, our George ?”

The old woman leaned upon a knotted staff among the frosting cabbages and strained her eyes to see what she feared. It was terrible to think of that strange, hunted face with the familiar eyes hiding among the shadows. She sent out her trembling breath yet again.

“ Our George, I knows you be theer. Do 'ee spake to I. Say wut 'ee' ev' bin an' done. For the sake of Almighty Gracious !”

This time a rattling, desperate whisper came back.

“ I 'ev' done one man in, I reckon, over to woodlands yonner, an' sp'iled another chap. An' I means to 'ev' another yit an' swing for 'n an' addun. No more o' prison for I. I 'n swore it afore God !”

She panted:

“Can’t you fare to git away somehow?”

The answer was surly, but not unkind:

“Not wi’out one o’ they wingships the newspapers tull o’. Git you back along into house, our Gran’. You’ll ketch your death o’ cold.”

“I’d lived too long, I reckoned, the day the bye I’d reared were took for a murderer!”

There seemed to be a long silence on the part of the hidden man, then the boy’s voice said from the depths of the brake:

“Our Gran’!”

Her heart swelled to bursting. She quavered out:

“My dear?”

“I niver did it, Gran’. ‘T were one o’ they chaps from Lunnon. I told the truth to the magistrates at sessions an’ to the judge at ‘sizes. But ‘t weren’t a mite o’ use. I gotten my bad name then. Now let they hang me an’ be damned to ‘em! I’ll bide here till the harriers draws. Then ‘t is a fightin’ hare. For livin’ they sha’n’t take I niver no more. Git in out o’ the cold, I tull ‘ee! ‘T is all ‘ee can do for I, I reckons!”

Her mind was made up now. She saw as by one vivid flare of lightning the one thing she could do for him. Her voice had authority:

“You can fare to come in along, our George, an’ hev a bit to eat an’ drink. They won’t be ‘ere yit a whiles.”

He was sorely tempted, but made a faint resistance. Her breathed reply was as emphatic as short:

“They may come to fetch ‘ee, as you tulls; but they wun’t git ‘ee. You can ‘pend on what I says. They shull niver git ‘ee, I tull ‘ee!”

The boy’s old habit of confidence overcame the doubts of the man. There was a rustling of dead leaves and a

cracking of branches. A shadowy figure crept out of the brake, held back by brambles that were loath to let him go. After that the back-door was bolted again, and the peep-hole window blocked up by a rusty Bible. But faint streaks of lamplight showed through chinks, and somebody within was moving over the creaky floor.

IV.

Men came with the blink of day, and beat and hammered on the door. The old man, peering over his blankets, chuckled and pointed knowingly at the cupboard beside the chimney; the old woman climbed the rickety stool, and, with infinite exertion, reached down something heavy from above the chimney-shelf. And the knocking at the door went on. Men's voices shouted roughly, ordering those within to open. More men were gathered at the rearward door, in case the quarry should escape that way. They had been guided to his last hiding-place by the blackening footmarks among the frost-rimed weeds and grasses. Their breath steamed up like the hot breath of hounds, but the December frost had not spoiled their hunting. They were keen upon the scent. When at length they threatened to break down a door, the bolts were drawn back. It swung inward as a rush of men surged over the threshold.

Three panting constables, a couple of blown keepers, and some village loafers, greedy for a sensation at first hand, came in. They fell back, crowding upon one another, as the old woman faced them. Her back was turned to the cupboard press that was built into the wall beside the chimney. Her keen old eyes blazed yellow in the shadow of her flapping, quilted sun-bonnet. She held her lean, narrow figure erect, and the poacher's gun was in her hand as she demanded:

"Wut come you 'ere fer, a-'ammerin' an' a-shoutin'? Wut makes 'ee threaten decent folks wi' breakin' down theer doors?"

"Us wants the poachin' raskil you be 'idin' 'ere!" announced a rosy constable.

The old woman answered:

"Theer be no raskils under this roof unless you've bringed one in-along."

There was a horse-laugh. An elderly, whiskered man in corduroys and leggings warned her sternly not to interfere with the police in the execution of their duty.

"I bain't interferin' wi' en,'" she asserted stoutly. "'Tis they be meddlin' wi' me. An' how should I 'ev' raskils 'idden 'ere? Who be they, seemin'ly?"

"One be your grandson, George Hammans. So us gits he, you're free to kip the rest!"

This time the laugh was on the side of the constable. She proclaimed:

"I 'ev' 'ad no grandson goin' on twenty year'. The law be to thank fer that, an' the devils that made it! An' wheer could a man lay hid i' our one room?"

"Look under the bed," advised a bystander.

She grasped the poacher's gun in both her trembling hands with such menacing vigour in the action that the stooping constable suddenly became perpendicular, and backed toward the door. The whites of men's eyes showed in faces that had lost their ruddy colour. For a moment it seemed, as she stood quivering, between the intruders and the cupboard that was beside the chimney, as though the day were hers. The fussy constable, retreating backward on a wedge of humanity more solicitous in its private interests than for the maintenance of the supreme authority of justice, said placably:

"Well, well, Missis Hammans, so long as us gits your

'surance there bain't no law-breaker ner no crimernil concealed on the premerses——"

He was interrupted by a quavery voice that chuckled mbecilely:

"Our George comed back wi' a gre-at blagg beard on. An' her 'ev' shut 'ee oop in the cub——"

The old woman's strong voice interrupted:

"Our Dad, you 'old your n'ise!"

But the old man, feebly obstinate, was not to be silenced. He went on jabbering unintelligible words. And his fleshless, earthy-hued hands, wavering above the blankets, pointed to the cupboard-press beside the chimney.

"I reckon," the whiskered man was speaking, "as no proper search ha' bin made o' this domersil until there've bin a thorough 'vestigation o' the inside o' that cupboard 'longside chimbley."

He pushed the retreating constable forward as he spoke. There was a murmur from the men behind, a chuckle from the old man, then a shrill and furious voice screamed:

"Doan't none o' you lay a finger on that theer cubberd! Doan't you dare, I tull 'ee!"

"Open it, then, you, an' show us wut's inside 'n!" said the placable constable.

The old woman took the only way of keeping a promise she had made. She raised the gun to her gaunt shoulder, and fired point-blank into the cupboard. A shrill scream, like that of a shot rabbit, escaped her at the deafening report. There was a terrible, almost simultaneous cry within the cupboard, and through the thick white smoke men saw the worm-eaten, shot-riddled door fall outward with the body of the man who had been hiding there.

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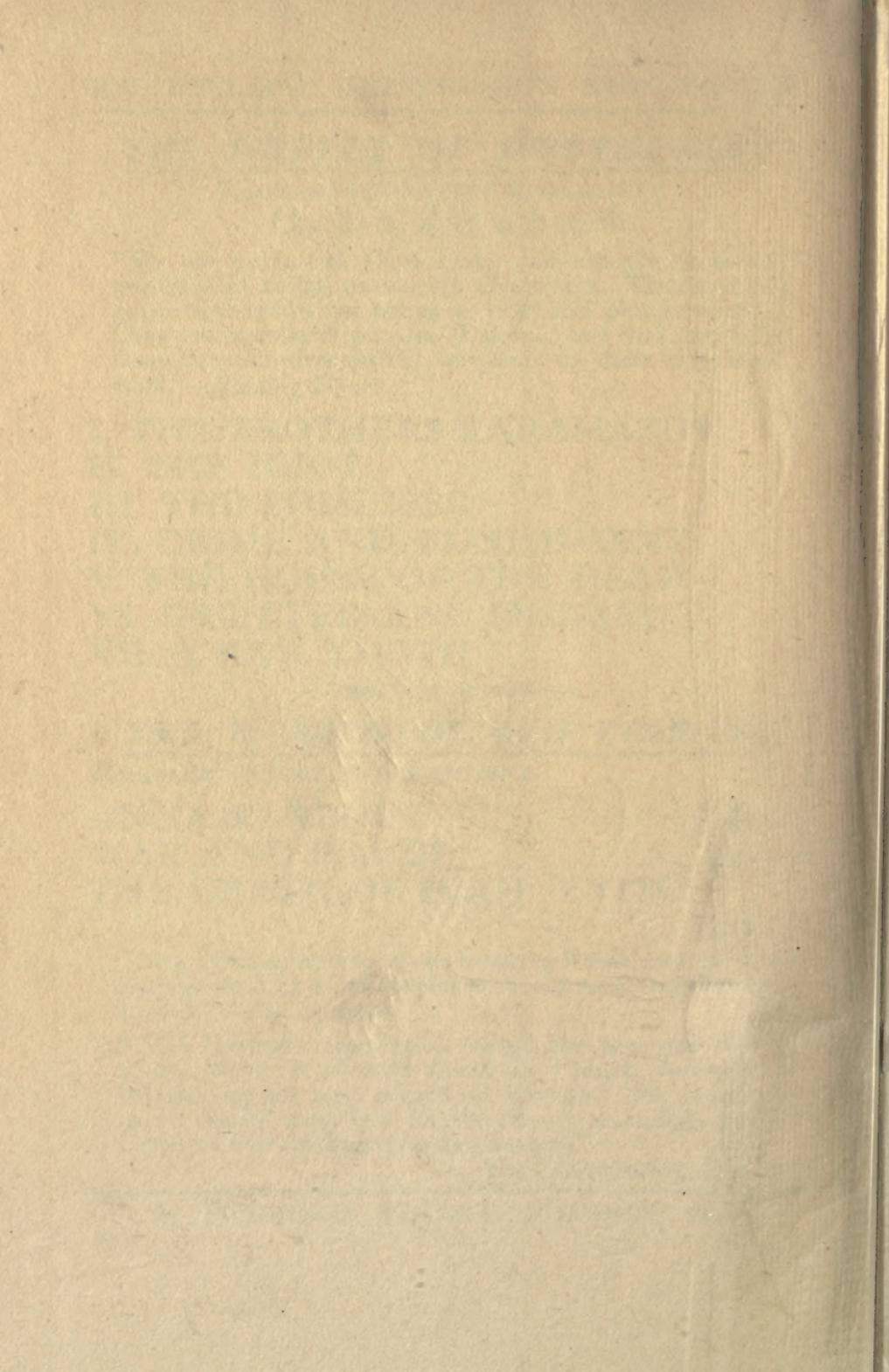
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